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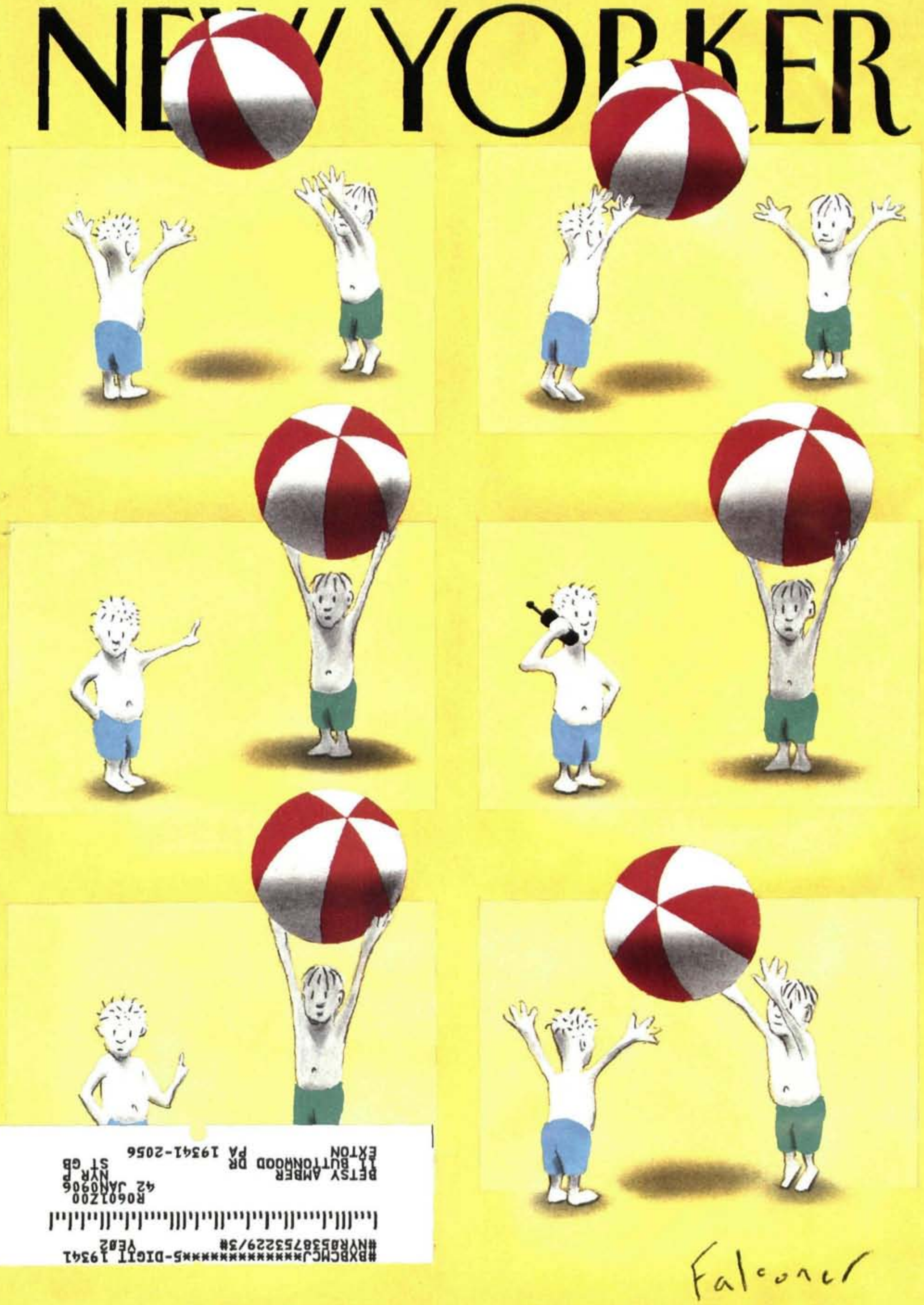
AUG. 22, 2005

THE NEW YORKER



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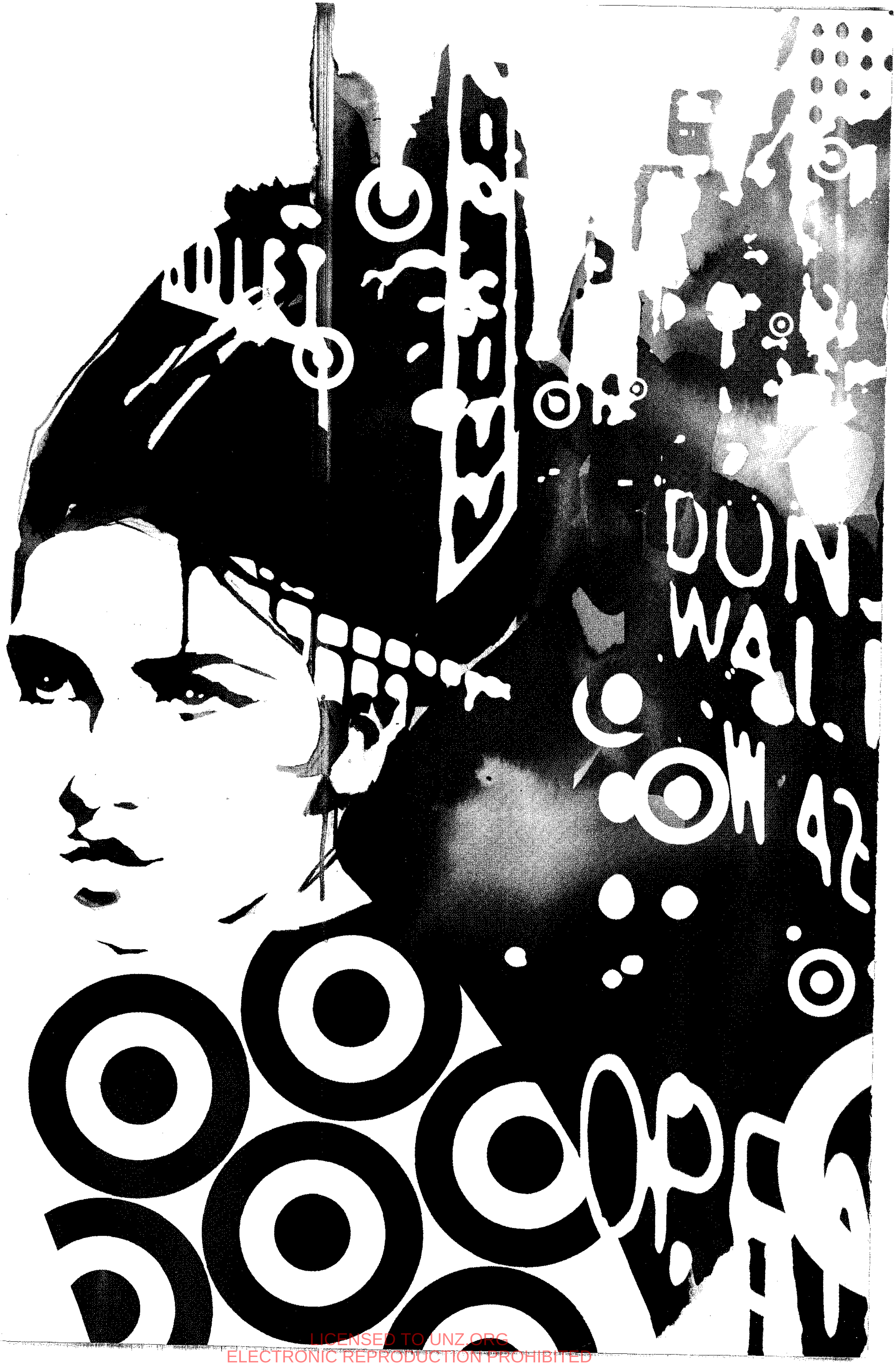
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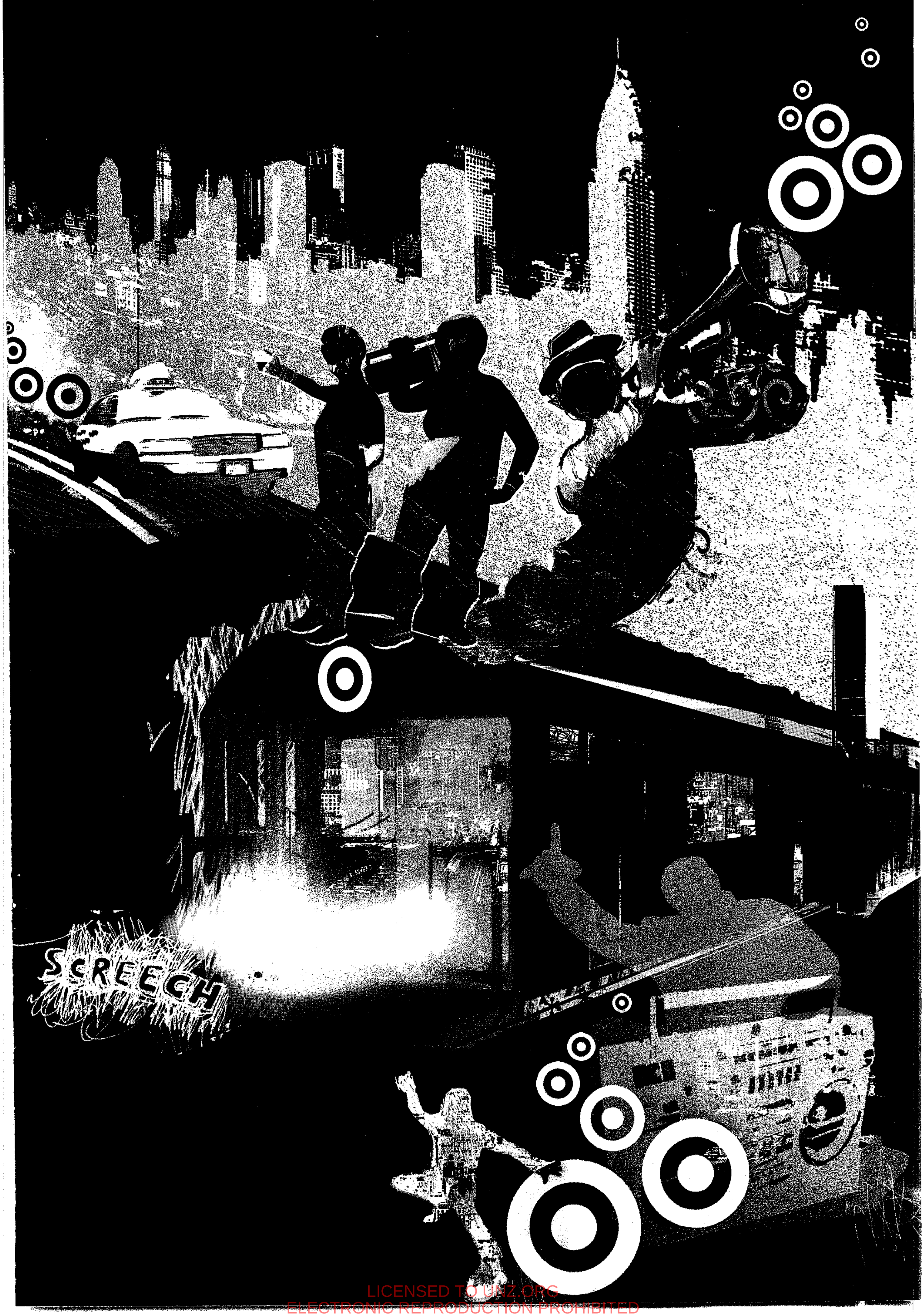
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THE NEW YORKER

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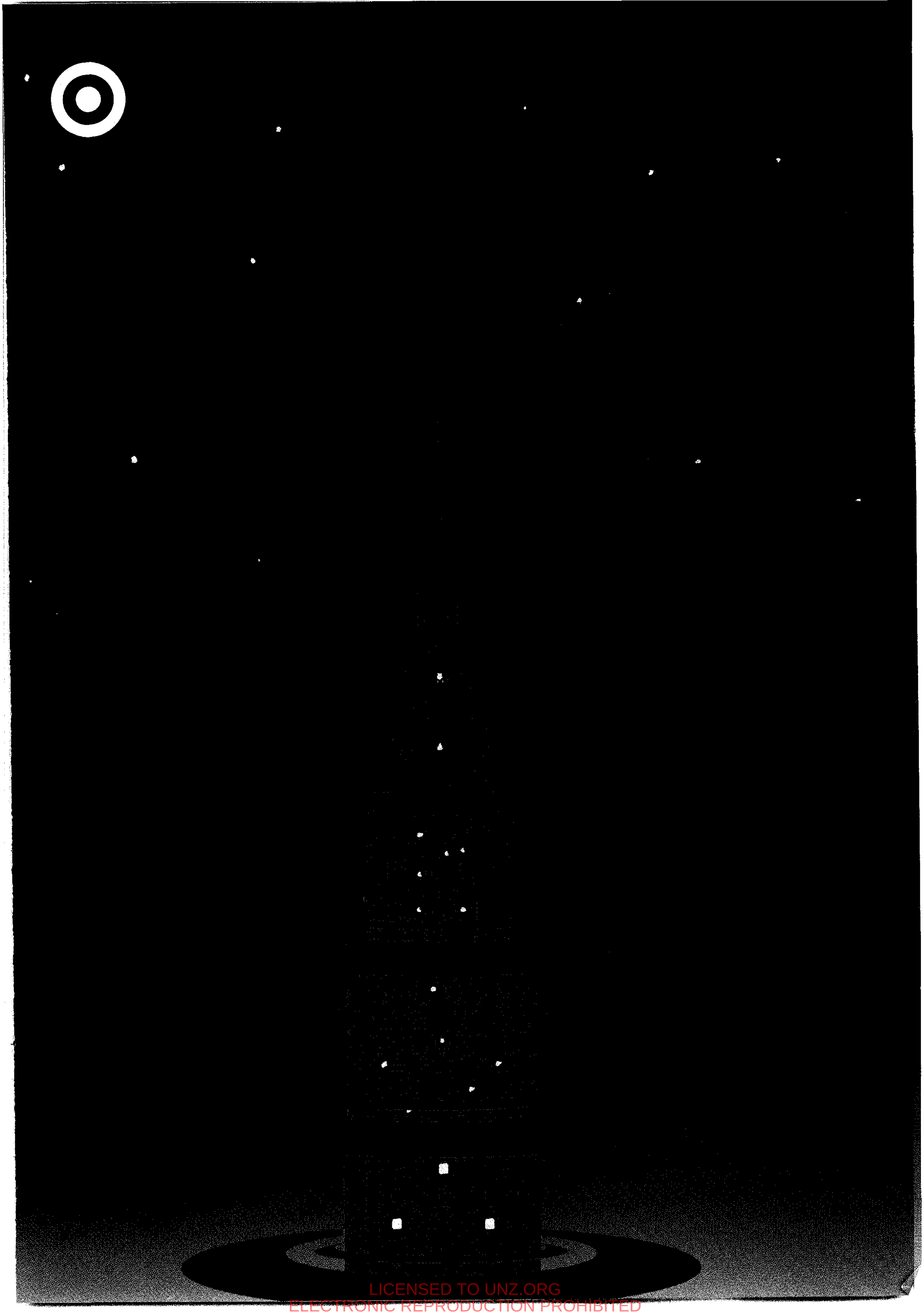

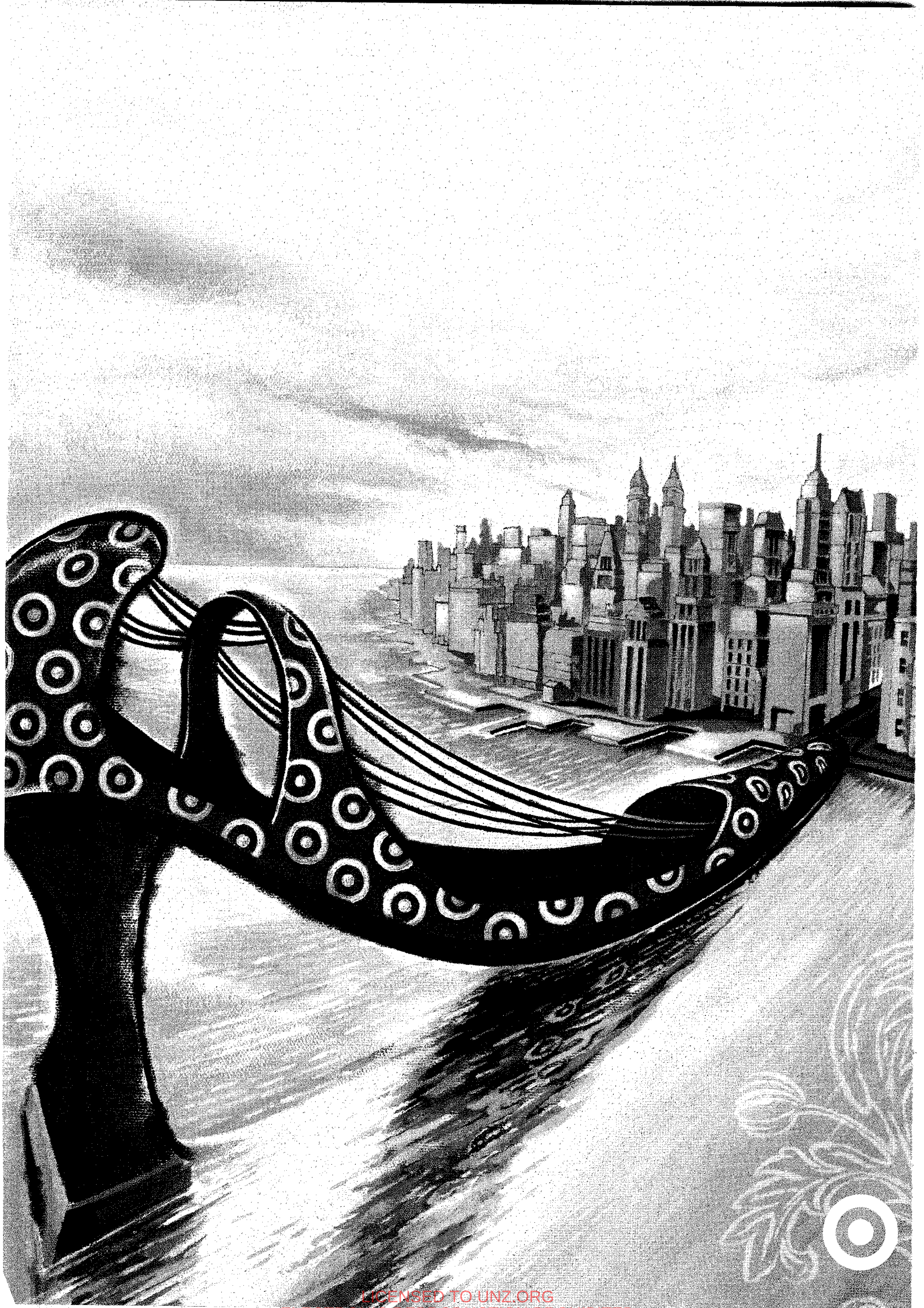

CONTRIBUTORS

Adam Gopnik ("The Real Thing," p. 36) wrote the magazine's Paris Journal for several years. He is the author of "Paris to the Moon."

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 21) is the author of "Politics: Observations & Arguments," which came out in paperback this summer.

Dan Halpern ("Lone Star," p. 26) is a freelance writer.

Gina Ochsner (Fiction, p. 56) is the author of two short-story collections, "The Necessary Grace to Fall" and "People I Wanted to Be," which was published in May.

Joel Stein (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 35) contributes to the Los Angeles *Times* and *Time*. He also writes for a television sitcom, "Crumbs," that will air this season.

Maira Kalman (Sketchbook, p. 48) is a writer and illustrator. Her illustrated version of Strunk and White's "The Elements of Style" comes out in October.

Peter J. Boyer ("The Big Tent," p. 42) is a staff writer. His piece about Catholicism in America appeared in the magazine in May.

Carin Besser (Poem, p. 30) is an editor at the magazine.

Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 85) is the author of "Nobody's Perfect: Writings from *The New Yorker*," which is available in paperback.

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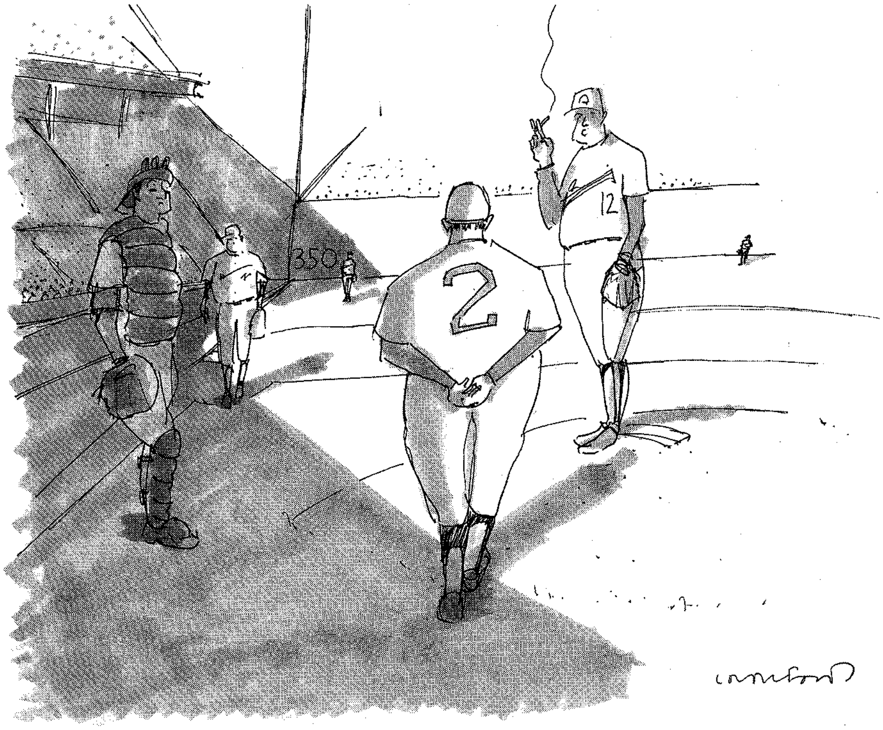
Guy Delisle (Illustration, p. 65), a cartoonist, has a graphic novel, "Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea," coming out in September.

Jim Holt (A Critic at Large, p. 69) has been contributing to the magazine since 1995. ♦



"What now?"

THE MAIL

REMEMBERING KAHN

In his essay on Herman Kahn, Louis Menand correctly observes that President Kennedy's 1960 argument that a "missile gap" had left America behind the Soviets in the arms race was, militarily speaking, nonsense (Books, June 27th). Kahn's civil-defense thinking was based on inaccurate Air Force intelligence used by the RAND Corporation, Kahn's employer in the fifties. Menand also says that President Eisenhower rejected civil-defense programs "in part because he was a cheapskate." But there is reason to suppose that Eisenhower had better intelligence, some that he could not talk about, and knew that Soviet missile strength was trivial. Furthermore, careful federal studies were fast discrediting Kahn's earlier civil-defense work. Kahn's core argument gained him political clout and funding, but much of his book "On Thermonuclear War" simply diverted attention from other research that had torn his proposals apart.

Frederick Thayer
Professor Emeritus, Public and International Affairs
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Menand's appraisal of Kahn mentions in passing that, in 1942, Bernard Brodie published "A Guide to Naval Strategy" without having been on a ship or having seen an ocean. It is worth noting, in Brodie's favor, that when he first published his book it had the title "A Layman's Guide to Naval Strategy." When the United States Navy decided to purchase several thousand copies of a new edition, for distribution to naval officers, the word "Layman's" was omitted from the title.

Thomas C. Schelling
Bethesda, Md.

I became acquainted with Kahn in 1960 in the course of a pacifist project called the San Francisco-to-Moscow Walk for Peace. Kahn took the time to talk with us about our project and made his home available as the setting for an episode of a film that was being made about the walk. He disagreed with a number of our ideas about pacifism and nonviolence but heard us out courteously, and explained his own position in considerable detail. He was by far the most open-minded of any of the deterrence strategists I encountered.

Bradford Lyttle
Chicago, Ill.

Menand is quite right to conclude that "On Thermonuclear War" lost touch with reality when it assumed that the Soviet Union was "an eternally and implacably hostile enemy" wanting nothing other than its own "aggrandizement." In fairness to Kahn, though, in 1960 America had only comparatively recently finished fighting a war against an enemy who largely conformed to this description and who, indeed, wanted things much worse than mere aggrandizement.

Nicholas Danforth
Washington, D.C.

When I joined the RAND Corporation, in the summer of 1957, Herman Kahn was a commanding presence there. I recall him on the RAND patio playing—appropriately, perhaps—a game of kriegspiel, a German variant of chess, with the great mathematician Johnny von Neumann. However, Kahn seemed less impressive the last time I met him, in 1967, at a weeklong seminar at the Hudson Institute. I questioned one of his startling assertions and asked for his source. He said, "I'll get back to you on that." At the next meeting, I asked him again. He said, "*Newsweek.*"

Hall Tripp Sprague
La Jolla, Calif.

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Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

Glimmerglass Opera, in Cooperstown, New York. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
21	22	23	17	18	19	20

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
TRAILER FABULOUS

Lowbrow thrills are set to music in David Nehls and Betsy Kelso's comedy "The Great American Trailer Park Musical," set in the fictional locale of Armadillo Acres. The show was a hit at last year's New York Musical Theatre Festival and begins previews this week Off Broadway. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
NEW SOUNDS

Mash-ups—fashionable pop-culture artifacts that are created by combining two existing songs—get a live twist this week at "Amsterjam." The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Snoop Dogg, Garbage, and many other acts will perform, both on their own and together. The flamboyant bassist Bootsy Collins, of P-Funk fame, is the curator and the master of ceremonies. (See page 11.)

ART
MIRROR WORLD

Jim Hodges' fifty-foot-long stainless-steel sculpture, which is broken up with holes, mirror polishes, and camouflage patterns, alternately frames and reflects familiar views around the plaza in front of the Ritz-Carlton in Battery Park City. (See page 13.)

DANCE
MOSTLY MORRIS

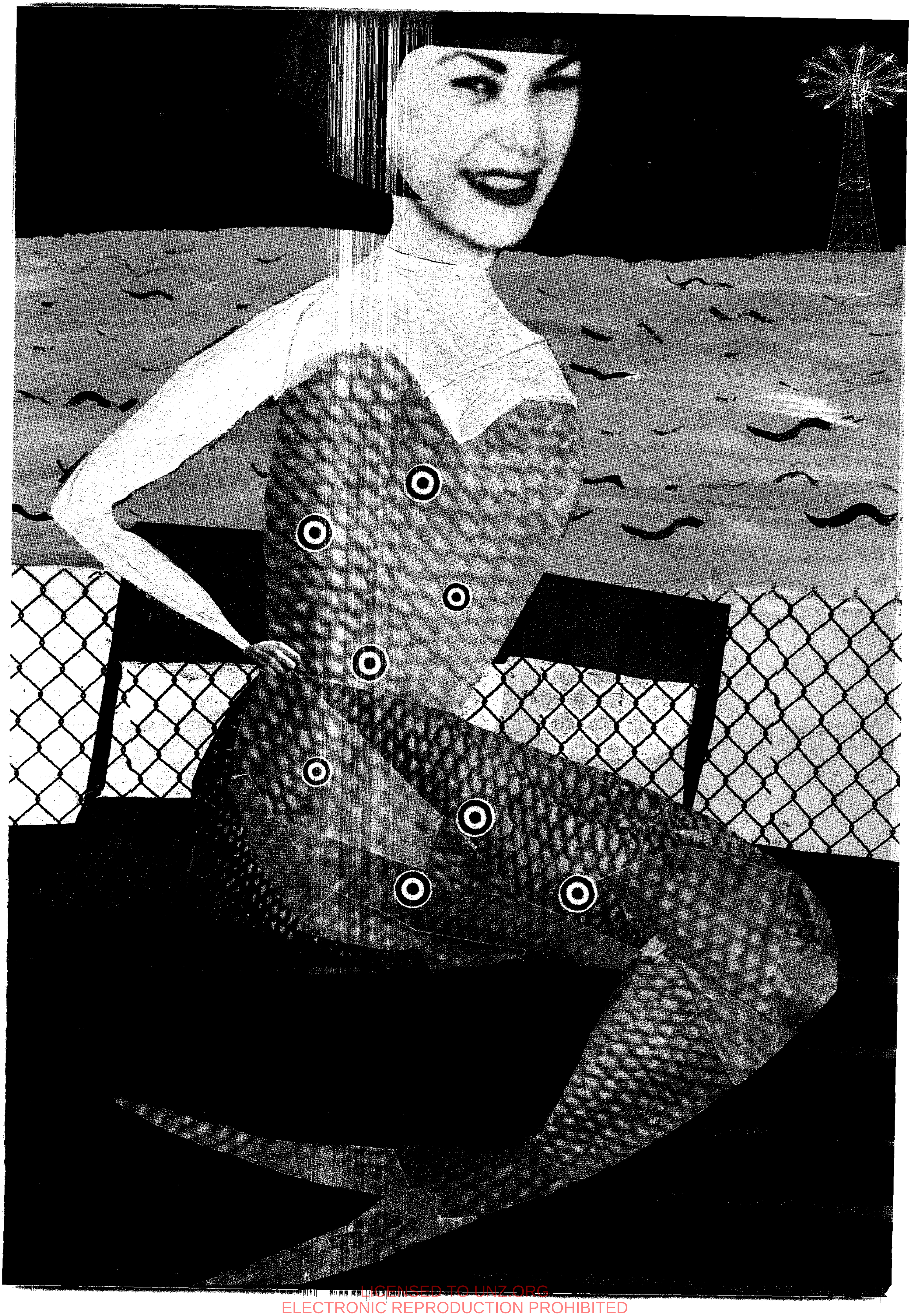
Mark Morris Dance Group brings the choreographer's 1988 work "L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato" to the Mostly Mozart Festival; the dancers are accompanied by the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the Riverside Choral Society Chamber Singers. (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPEN-AIR OPERA

The soprano Georgia Jarman and the baritone Michael Corvino, young stars of the New York City Opera, are featured in "Afternoon Arias," a free lunchtime concert in Bryant Park. (See page 14.)

MOVIES
TOONS WITH TUNES

From the pioneering "Skeleton Dance" (1928) to the Bugs Bunny bio-pic "What's Up, Doc?" (1950) to the recent art-house hit "The Triplets of Belleville" (2003), Walter Reade Theatre screens animated musicals from the past eight decades. (See page 18.)



THE THEATRE
OPENING AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BELLY OF A DRUNKEN PIANO
A one-man show by the Australian actor and musician Stewart D'Arrietta pays tribute to the life and music of Tom Waits by drawing on thirty years of songs. Previews begin Aug. 17. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

DEDICATION OR THE STUFF OF DREAMS
Nathan Lane, Alison Fraser, and Marian Seldes star in a new play by Terrence McNally, about an idealistic couple who yearn to buy a theatre in upstate New York. A Primary Stages production. Michael Morris directs. Two previews on Aug. 17. Opens Aug. 18 at 7. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE GREAT AMERICAN TRAILER PARK MUSICAL
Set in a Florida trailer park called Armadillo Acres, this musical comedy has a book by Betsy Kelso (who directs), music and lyrics by David Nehls, and a set by Derek McLane ("I Am My Own Wife"). Previews begin Aug. 20. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

SIDES: THE FEAR IS REAL
This very funny show about the trials and terrors of Asian-American actors at theatre auditions comes to the Culture Project after a sold-out run last spring at P.S. 122. Presented by Mr. Miyagi's Theatre Company. Previews begin Aug. 18. (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA
The Public Theatre's second Shakespeare in the Park production this summer is a revival of John Guare and Mel Shapiro's 1971 musical adaptation, with a score by Galt MacDermot ("Hair"). Kathleen Marshall directs. In previews. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

WOMEN CENTER STAGE 2005
The Culture Project's celebration of women in the arts runs through Aug. 31 and includes staged readings by Marisa Tomei, Lynn Redgrave, and others; panel discussions; and the play "The Speed Queen," a drama about a female inmate on death row, performed by Anne Stockton, who adapted it from a novel by Stewart O'Nan. New this week: a staged reading of "Girl Blog from Iraq: Baghdad Burning." For full festival schedule, visit www.womencenterstage.com. (45 Bleecker St. 212-352-3101.)

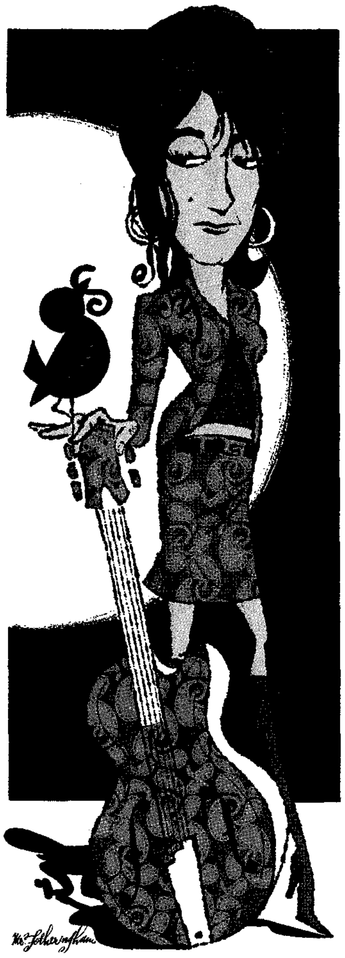
NOW PLAYING

THE AMERICAN LIVING ROOM
The multidisciplinary festival at HERE Arts Center includes dozens of new works of theatre, dance, video, and less classifiable genres. (145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444. Through Aug. 21.)

THE CONSTANT WIFE
A splendid revival by the Roundabout Theatre Company of W. Somerset Maugham's 1926 drawing-room comedy. Lynn Redgrave shines as the right and very honorable Mrs. Culver, a woman who is not afraid to speak her mind and who does so with élan. Kate Burton plays her daughter Constance, whose doctor husband of fifteen years (Michael Cumpsty) is having an affair with Marie-Louise (Kathryn Meisle)—Constance's best friend. "The Constant Wife" is Oscar Wilde lite, but no matter. Everything about this production is such a pleasure—from Allen Moyer's set design and Michael Krass's costumes to Mark Brokaw's impeccable direction—that the hackneyed plot and loopy logic barely register. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/27/05.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. Through Aug. 21.)

THE DEAR BOY
The Second Stage Theatre Uptown series continues with a new play by Dan O'Brien, about an English teacher who is nearing retirement and two of his pupils. Directed by Michael John Garcés ("The Cook"). (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422. Through Aug. 27.)

DRUMSTRUCK
Catharsis comes in many forms, but on a hot summer evening there's nothing quite like banging on a *djembe*, keeping time with an ensemble of master African drummers and dancers. In this show from Johannesburg, each audience member is provided with a two-foot-tall drum, which the spirited performers demonstrate how to use to exhilarating effect. Highlights of the evening include a percussive dance from the Gauteng gold mines and the song "Jikele Maweni," a full-throated ballad made famous by Miriam Makeba. David Warren directs. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)



Holly Golightly plays the Mercury Lounge and Northsix this week.

FATAL ATTRACTION: A GREEK TRAGEDY
A hammy retelling of the 1987 film, complete with bad perms, a boiled bunny who rises from the grave for a dance break, and a portentous Greek chorus. Corey Feldman makes his stage début in the Michael Douglas role, while Alana McNair and Kate Wilkinson, who adapted the show from the original, stand in for Glenn Close and Anne Archer. Much of the comedy hinges on the debatable view that the movie demonizes businesswomen, and at times the satire wears thin. But Feldman carries the show with his gruff, gung-ho impersonation. Timothy Haskell ("I Love Paris") directs. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200. Through Aug. 27.)

JOY
A romantic comedy by John Fisher, set in San Francisco, in which a group of college friends—some gay, some undecided—fall in and out of love. Directed by Ben Rimalower. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 212-239-6200.)

LENNON
A musical portrait of the life and songs of John Lennon features multiple Lennons, portrayed by Will Chase and Terrence Mann, among others. Julie Danao-Salkin plays Yoko Ono. Written and directed by Don Scardino. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
Broad parodies, political satires, biographical dramas, sexy skits, and homages to classic books and TV shows go head to head in the festival's ninth year. Nearly two hundred productions will be presented, by theatre and dance companies from twenty-two countries. For full festival schedule, visit www.fringenyc.org. (212-279-4488. Through Aug. 28.)

OEDIPUS AT PALM SPRINGS
Leigh Silverman directs the Five Lesbian Brothers in their first new production in eight years—a satirical revisiting of Greek tragedy, set in modern times. (Reviewed in this issue.) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

ONE-MAN STAR WARS TRILOGY
In this inspired act of madness, the Canadian actor Charles Ross recaps "Star Wars," "The Empire Strikes Back," and "The Return of the Jedi" in a single hour, portraying not only Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, and Han Solo but R2-D2 (Ross's droid whistle-speech imitation is uncanny), AT-AT walkers, the trash-compactor snake, and even the floating words in the films' opening credits. As he crouches, leaps, towers, hovers, and cowers, embodying all manner of animate and inanimate things, he makes knowing jokes to thrill the audience members—most of whom know every word he utters by heart. Directed by TJ Dawe. (Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!
At the Irish Repertory Theatre, an excellent cast revives Brian Friel's bittersweet 1964 play about Gar O'Donnell, a young Irishman who resolves to leave his home town of Ballybeg—a place where time changes nothing, particularly the ties between father and son—and travel to Philadelphia. As he ponders parting from the lads he knocked around with and the girl he loved, he splits into two characters: the clever, cynical Private Gar (superbly played by James Kennedy) and his boyish alter ego, Public Gar (Michael FitzGerald). A nuanced production, sensitively directed by Ciarán O'Reilly. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through Sept. 4.)

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
B. D. Wong leads the cast in a revival of "Pippin," the tongue-in-cheek 1972 musical that imagines the coming-of-age struggles of Charlemagne's son. Music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by Roger O. Hirson. Jack Hofsiss ("The Elephant Man") directs. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500. Through Sept. 4.)

GOODSPEED MUSICALS
In 1954, Julie Andrews made her Broadway début in "The Boy Friend," Sandy Wilson's spoof of nineteen-twenties musical comedies, playing a giddy English heiress who falls for a delivery boy. Now she is directing a revival of the play, in Connecticut. (Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, Conn. 860-873-8668.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
"Two Gentlemen of Verona" plays on the tented outdoor stage at the Boscobel Restoration. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Cold Spring, N.Y. 845-265-9575. Through Sept. 4.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
A revival of William Inge's play "Bus Stop," about a night-club singer named Cherie (a role Marilyn Monroe made famous) and a cowboy named Bo who get stranded in a snowstorm in Kansas. Directed by Will Frears. Aug. 17-28. For full festival schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

Also Playing

ALL SHOOK UP: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **ALTAR BOYZ:** Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG:** Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100. **FOOLS IN LOVE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. **GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 28.) **LAZER VAUDEVILLE:** Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 21.) **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **MOVIN' OUT:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **ORSON'S SHADOW:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **THE PILLOWMAN:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SWEET CHARITY:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TALK OF THE TOWN:** Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. 212-840-6800. (Through Aug. 22.) **THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING):** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Sept. 4.) **TWELFTH NIGHT:** Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave., between 24th and 25th Sts. 212-279-4200. (Closes Aug. 21.) **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200. **WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Sept. 4.) **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

"AMSTERJAM"
This festival, presumably named in honor of the home of its sponsor, Heineken, and not because of the titular city's tolerance of banned substances, features the **Red Hot Chili Peppers, 311, Snoop Dogg, Peaches, Garbage, Wyclef Jean, Fat Joe,** and the funk legend **Bootsy Collins.** After their individual sets, bands and artists from disparate genres will perform together to create live "mash-ups." (Randall's Island. 212-307-7171. Aug. 20.)

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Aug. 17: The blues-harmonica master **James Cotton** turns seventy in style. Aug. 18-19: **Dickey Betts,** the former Allman Brothers guitarist and songwriter (most notably of "Ramblin' Man"), flies the flag of Southern rock. Aug. 20: The all-girl tribute band **Lez Zeppelin** celebrates Robert Plant's birthday. Their name may sound like a variation on a juvenile epithet, but Lez Zeppelin is no joke. These ladies channel the sonic bombast of Led Zeppelin and gleefully invert the band's original sexual essence. With **Black Dog.** Aug. 22: **Sizzla,** the hottest act to come out of Jamaica in the late nineties and the reigning ambassador of the conscious-reggae movement, has an unreconstructed attitude toward homosexuality (a recent reggae festival in Paris in which he was slated to perform was cancelled when organizers feared a conflict between protesters and concertgoers).

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 19-23: The ambitious young singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist **Sufjan Stevens** has put out a number of albums this decade, but they were just a warmup for his current project, which involves writing and releasing a record for each of the fifty states. He kicked it off two years ago, with "Greetings from Michigan: The Great Lakes State," an homage to his birthplace. His latest release, "Illinois," finds him moving through the Midwest.

CBGB & OMFUG
315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-982-4052)—Aug. 20: The **Vandals** do their part in the ongoing campaign to save this storied venue from the mosh pit of history (the club's lease expires at the end of the month). Veterans of the punk community in Orange County, California, the Vandals had a stab at glory in 1984, when they performed in Penelope Spheeris's troubled-teen feature "Suburbia." It wasn't until the early nineties, though, that the band's brand of snotty irreverence seized the public's imagination, allowing Blink-182, the Offspring, and other like-minded bands to hit it big.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—Aug. 18: A triple bill of geek-chic indie rockers, with **Death Cab for Cutie,** the **Stars,** and the **Decemberists.** The headliner, Death Cab, has a cult following thanks to the complex guitar work and the earnest introspective lyrics of its front man, Ben Gibbard. The Canadian orchestral pop group Stars performs cerebral ballads about twenty-something love and heartache. The Decemberists, a Portland, Oregon, theatrical folk-pop band led by the singer, songwriter, and guitarist Colin Meloy, infuse quirky tales of faraway lands with bits of maritime lore.

CONTINENTAL AIRLINES AREA
The Meadowlands, East Rutherford, N.J. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 23: **System of a Down** is an unlikely success story. The Armenian-American hard-rock quartet mixes sonically difficult music with a distinctly political stance (Michael Moore directed their video "Boom," in 2003). Their brazen music occupies an unsteady middle ground between Frank Zappa and Slayer.

THE HOOK
18 Commerce St., Red Hook, Brooklyn (718-797-3007)—Aug. 20: The wordsmith **GZA** has long been regarded as one of the most verbally precise lyrical masters of the Wu-Tang Clan rap collective. He was one of the crew's founders, in the early nineties, and his solo albums "Beneath the Surface" and "Liquid Swords" reached No. 1 and No. 2 respectively on the R. & B. charts later that decade. Working off the momentum of "Legend of the Liquid Sword," his 2002 album, GZA continues to lay cerebral lyrics over bass-heavy rap and R. & B. rhythms.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Wednesdays this month, **Raul Malo,** the former leader of the beloved country-rock band the Mavericks, settles in for a series of acoustic shows. Aug. 21: **Rivers Rutherford,** a noted Nashville songwriter, and **Steve McEwan,** the front man of the British roots-rock band Unamerican.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Aug. 20: The **Reigning Sound,** an incendiary garage-rock band from Memphis, churns out a guitar-based racket in the spirit of the Sonics, the Lyres, and their old touring buddies the Hives.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Aug. 18: **Holly Golightly** started her musical career in the early nineties with a garage-rock group, Thee Headcoatees, but she looked to country blues and early rock for inspiration when she started releasing solo records (and she's released quite a few in the past decade). In 2003 she turned up on the White Stripes' acclaimed album "Elephant," which introduced her to a larger group of fans. Aug. 22: The veteran guitarist **Charlie Sexton,** who has worked with Bob Dylan, Lucinda Williams, and Steve Earle, stops by with songs from his forthcoming album, "Cruel and Gentle Things." It's his first in ten years, and it's been just about as long since he toured these parts.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Aug. 16: **Holly Golightly** (see the Mercury Lounge). Aug. 20: The hip-hop luminary **Prince Paul.**

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—Aug. 19: The alt-rocker **Juliana Hatfield** has a dark and lovely new album, "Made in China," that's full of chaotic, confessional songs about alienation and desire, depression and heartache. With the **Natural History** and the **Hong Kong.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 16-21: The **Cedar Walton** quartet, with **Vincent Herring.** Decorous bop piano meets impassioned bop saxophone. Walton, a respected keyboard veteran noted for his work with Art Blakey in the mid-sixties, brings a world of experience and his superior compositions to the table. Herring has fervor and increasing maturity as a modernist improviser on his side.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Aug. 18-21: Thirty-five years after the Beatles called it quits, their wondrous songs have yet to enter the mainstream-jazz repertoire. **Beatlejazz,** featuring the drummer Brian Melvin and the keyboardist David Kikoski, is out to remedy that puzzling situation. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The pianist **Mulgrew Miller's** career has progressed the old-fashioned way, from valued sideman (with Art Blakey and Woody Shaw, among others) to trusted journeyman to established master. His wide range as a bandleader is highlighted during a weeklong fiftieth-birthday celebration. The shows start on Aug. 16, when his topnotch trio is joined by the vibraphonist **Steve Nelson.** Aug. 17-18: Duets with his fellow piano master **Kenny Barron.** Aug. 19-20: Nelson returns to the trio, along with the saxophonist **Joe Lovano.** Aug. 21: Miller's Wingspan ensemble closes out the run.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—Aug. 21: **Henry Threadgill** continues to favor unpredictable and adventurous musical ploys. His new 3+3 ensemble incorporates cellos, along with tuba, drums, and the leader's atmospheric reeds.

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Aug. 18-19: **Sherman Irby,** an alto saxophonist whose expressiveness keeps pace with his rhythmic drive, has a rich new album, "Faith."

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Aug. 16-21: The virtuosic trombonist, composer, and arranger **Slide Hampton**—cherished for his work with Dizzy Gillespie, Dexter Gordon, and Art Farmer—leads a sextet in a program of songs by Antonio Carlos Jobim. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—**"Matisse: The Fabric of Dreams, His Art and His Textiles,"** a revelatory, achingly beautiful show, pairs items from the artist's personal fabric collection with paintings and graphic works in which they played crucial roles. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Adorning the World: Art of the Marquesas Islands"** is a small show of objects dating from the late eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century, from the Polynesian island group that was Paul Gauguin's last home. The Marquesans embellished everything—their bodies with tattoos, pipes and musical instruments with carving, headdresses with feathers—and let little go to waste. One vitrine is filled with ornaments carved from the bones of enemies killed in battle. Through Jan. 15. ♦ Two recent in-

stallations are on view in **"Tony Oursler at the Met: 'Studio' and 'Climaxed.'"** The first contemplates influences on the artist through an assemblage of pieces by the likes of Jacqueline Humphries, Rem Koolhaas, and Kaare Rafoss. The second, more traditional Oursler work is a giant, lumpy potato head with flames and a blinky face projected on it, its mouth voicing demented and hilarious threats, boasts, and sorrows. Through Sept. 18. ♦ **"All the Mighty World: The Photographs of Roger Fenton, 1852-1860."** Through Aug. 21. ♦ **"John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker"** presents a few dozen pieces by a prominent Colonial American furniture-maker alongside work by his contemporaries. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Sol LeWitt on the Roof: Splotches, Whirls, and Twirls."** A summer installation in the roof garden, featuring five spiky stalagmite sculptures and a wall drawing. Through Oct. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Pioneering Modern Painting: Cézanne and Pissarro, 1865-1885"** chronicles the careers of two friends who gave each other a leg up into brave new styles and techniques, though it quickly becomes clear that Cézanne, the younger artist by a decade, vaulted much higher. Through Sept. 12. ♦ **"Friedlander,"** a major retrospective of the work of the photographer Lee Friedlander (born in 1934). Through Aug. 29. ♦ Each of MOMA's six curatorial departments shows off recent purchases in **"New Work/New Acquisitions."** Among the twenty-four paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, photographs, films, videos, and architecture and design projects presented, it's video that wins Best in Show. Paul Chan's hypnotic double-sided projection suggests a Henry Darger tale crossed with a video game and transplanted to Iraq, Gillian Wearing's monumental triptych of a series of drunks falling down alternates between dispassion and compassion, and Mika Rottenberg's "Mary's Cherries" is a bizarre meditation on make-work office politics. The photo department has also scored a coup, with Walid Raad and the Atlas Group's vast archival project documenting car bombs in Beirut. Other attractions include works by Takashi Murakami, Neo Rauch, Shahzia Sikander, and Marcel Dzama. Through Sept. 26. ♦ **"The High Line"** details Field Operations and Diller Scofidio & Renfro's ambitious urban rails-to-trails scheme for the abandoned elevated tracks that run along the West Side from Gansevoort Street to Thirty-fourth Street. Through Oct. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Oteiza: Myth and Modernism."** The Basque sculptor Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003) followed in the high-modernist footsteps of Giacometti and Henry Moore. This small but expansive exhibition presents a thoughtful and inventive abstractionist, whose carved blocks of marble and folded planes of steel realize the aleatory, speculative geometries of his construction-paper collages. Through Aug. 24. ♦ **"Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition: Photographs and Mannerist Prints."** An exhibition that harmonizes Mapplethorpe's classically posed, erotically charged photographs with stylized sixteenth-century Flemish Mannerist prints. Through Aug. 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Robert Smithson,"** a retrospective of drawings, constructions, and collages, includes filmed, photographed, and sketched documentation of the iconic "Spiral Jetty." Through Oct. 23. ♦ Work by eight artists, including Terry Winters, Ati Maier, and Matthew Ritchie, is on display in **"Remote Viewing: Invented Worlds in Recent Painting and Drawing."** Through Oct. 9. ♦ **"Overhead/Underfoot: The Topographical Perspective in Photography"** is a small study of the aerial view in photographs dating from the mid-twentieth century on. Through Sept. 25. ♦ The eclectic gathering of works from the permanent collection in **"Landscape"** ranges from Jasper Johns's white maps to Ed Ruscha's rows of L.A. streets and Roni Horn's eerie comparison of the body and the earth, "Becoming a Landscape" (1999-2001). Through Sept. 18. ♦ **"Banks Violette: Untitled"** contemplates the romantic sublime with a model of a ruined church cast in salt and music composed by the black-metal musician Snorre Ruch. Through Oct. 2. ♦ **"Prints Into Drawings,"** a roomful of prints that were made in the past fifty years, illustrates the shared techniques of drawing and printmaking. Through Aug. 28. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries,"** a review of recent developments in the study of dinosaurs, provides insight into how the animals moved through their world. Biomechanics has answered questions about how fast dinosaurs could move and about how they balanced their multiton bodies on two legs; videos and a six-foot animatronic T.-rex skeleton demonstrate what's been learned. A diorama of the Liaoning Forest in China replicates Mesozoic conditions, and other stations explain new ideas about dinosaurs' relationships to modern birds, their herding behavior, and possible reasons for their abrupt extinction. Through Jan. 8, 2006. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Monet's London: Artists' Reflections on the Thames, 1859-1914"** includes Claude Monet's signature melting views of the Waterloo and Charing Cross Bridges, Whistler's "Thames Set" etchings (1859-60), and works by Winslow Homer, Childe Hassam, and André Derain, among others. Through Sept. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Traditions, Inventions and Exchange: Dance in Indonesia and Japan,"** a three-screen video projection, charts the discoveries of the Triangle Arts Program, a choreographers' exchange among Indonesia, Japan, and the United States. The triptych interweaves clips of performances and interviews by Molly Davies, the installation's creator, with choreographers. Kota Yamazaki's work is an electrifying mix of Butoh and modern technique; Tom Ibnur's vocabulary combines the spinning pageantry of Sufi dance, a Malay folk dance, and his own lyrical expressionism. Between conversations, the participants eat in noisy local restaurants and stroll through picturesque gardens. Through Aug. 21. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—Despite sincere curatorial effort, **"Jean Hélion,"** a subset of a larger retrospective organized by the Centre Pompidou, can do little to elevate its subject from minor-figure status. Trained as an architectural draughtsman, Hélion (1904-87) painted Mondrianish geometric abstractions in the early nineteen-thirties, moving on to organic, rounded forms later in the decade. After a stint as a soldier (and a prisoner of war) in the Second World War, he returned to painting, though he gave up abstraction for still-lifes, street scenes, and nudes. He favored the carnivalesque feel of brutal colors, knotty compositions, and surreal content, but his most pleasing paintings are often the least assuming: a handsomely disarticulated truck in "The Accident" (1979), a cluster of busted chairs painted in 1980. The Academy's addition of a roomful of paintings addressing Hélion's influence on American artists helps find the coherence in a career that spanned continents, styles, decades, and philosophies. Through Oct. 9. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"War/Hell: Master Prints by Otto Dix and Max Beckmann."** Through Sept. 26. (Open Fridays, 11 to 9, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
Temporarily situated in the Chelsea Art Museum, 556 W. 22nd St. (212-219-1222)—Patty Chang's **"Shangri La."** Through Sept. 10. ♦ Aernout Mik's video installation **"Refraction"** captures the movements of emergency workers and gawkers at a staged bus crash. The deflating sense of urgency—there are no victims—translates into something that feels more flat than frantic or compelling. Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Rhizome Artbase 101."** Through Sept. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO
BLT PRIME

111 E. 22nd St. (212-995-8500)—Laurent Tourondel's burgeoning chain (the name doesn't stand for "bacon, lettuce, and tomato"—it's an acronym of "bistro" plus his name) makes dependable, high-quality meals fancy enough to impress expense-account clients but conventional enough to appeal to a wide range of tastes. There's little to complain about, but not much that will transport you, especially on the steak end of the menu, where lightly seasoned slabs of beef are excellently turned out but hardly exceptional. And there are moments when the branding impulse becomes distracting. The menu urges the purchase of either an autographed copy of "Go Fish," Tourondel's seafood cookbook ($34), or a bottle of BLT Steak sauce ($9); the wine list includes a glass of BLT cuvée.

Still, the roaring-eighties atmosphere is fun and casual, with suit jackets flung over the backs of chairs and ties loosened, and there are a few notable red-meat moments. Tourondel offers a version of the B.L.T., with the addition of American Kobe beef (the real stuff, from Japan, has been banned in the U.S.) and foie gras, and a Kobe rib eye prepared with a sea-salt crust has a smoky allure. But the standouts on the menu are piscine. There's a light, refreshing lobster salad and a rosy tuna tartare balanced on a base of avocado and served with house-made potato chips. One evening, a special of halibut was served with a feathery brioche topping and intense, flavorful tomato water. The wallet-lightening sides and vegetables are mostly uninspired, including pasty blue-cheese tater tots. "It doesn't taste like food," one diner observed. "I can't tell if it's good or bad—it's just weird."

Desserts here are prominently displayed on a sidebar as enticement and are difficult to pass up. The white-peach cobbler is dewy and fresh, with a buttery, crunchy oatmeal crust. The sundaes, though, might be considered the place's mascot: excessive, indulgent, and forgettable. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $24-$75.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Greater New York 2005"** features work by more than a hundred and sixty artists from around the city who have emerged in the past five years. Through Sept. 26. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

UKRAINIAN MUSEUM
222 E. 6th St. (212-228-0110)—A supporting player in twentieth-century sculpture is shown to advantage in **"Alexander Archipenko: Vision and Continuity."** The exhibition highlights innovative work by the artist (1887-1964), from the painting-display machine he patented in 1927 (and dedicated to Einstein and Edison) to explorations of newly invented materials like Plexiglas and Formica. The show also includes plenty of the Ukrainian-born artist's better-known bronze nudes and torsos. It's exciting to see a modernist master forge bravely past mid-century and adopt the American fondness for plastics (particularly after he emigrated to the U.S., in 1923), in works like "Cleopatra" (1957), an abstract relief crafted from wood, found objects, and Bakelite. Through Sept. 18. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11:30 to 5.)

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

CHANTAL AKERMAN / YANG FUDONG
Two gallery artists offer projects that deviate slightly from their standard modus operandi. Fudong's "City Light" is an absurdist-noir film in which a woman and two men representing the artist and his doppelgänger move around Shanghai, culminating in a bossa-nova dance. Akerman, best known for her feminist, deconstructionist films, creates an installation inspired by her Polish grandmother's diary. For the centerpiece, a French text is projected onto a spiralling screen, like a translucent Richard Serra, literally wrapping the viewer in poetry. Through Aug. 26. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

LEROY GRANNIS
You don't have to know the difference between a rail grab and a tube ride to appreciate a great surfing photo. There's something thrilling (and hair-raising) about the sight of a tiny human figure gliding down the curl of a wave that's breaking several stories above his head. Grannis, a surfer himself, captured the thrill in the photographs he began taking in the early nineteen-sixties, long before the sport became a phenomenon and he became one of its legends. Nearly all the color images here are from that relatively innocent time, and the best of them have such you-are-there immediacy that you can practically taste the saltwater spray. Through Oct. 1. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

"REPEAT PERFORMANCE"
Repetition is the hallmark of minimalism, but it's evident in practically every period of art, from craftsmen's reproductions of religious icons to Warhol's soup cans. Here, repetitive mark-making is executed in baking soda, graphite, and glitter (Tim Nolan's wonderful geometric floor painting "Shift"), beeswax and paraffin (George Stoll's cast tumblers, which make their way into many of this gallery's shows), and staples (Alison Foshee's simple oak, willow, and gingko leaves are "drawn" into the paper with staples). Rounding things out are several of the usual suspects from art's golden age of repetition, the nineteen-sixties: Carl Andre, Walter De Maria, Frank Stella, Agnes Martin, and Eva Hesse. Through Sept. 17. (Anthony Grant, 37 W. 57th St. 212-755-0434.)

"TIMES TWO"
The theme of this photographic group show—which involves diptychs, repetition, and various sorts of doubling—might be simpleminded, but no matter: it's what's on the wall that counts, and much of that is quite smart. Included along with Helen Levitt, Ray K. Metzker, William Eggleston, and Michael Spano are two panoramas of Times Square by the sculptor Kenneth Snelson—one from 1980, the other from 1994—suggesting that brand-name ad placement is the only constant in a changing world. And Stéphane Couturier, whose shots of urban construction sites have always been arresting, comes through with a two-panel piece of office façades turned into syncopated color-field compositions. Through Aug. 19. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

Short List

JANET CARDIFF: Starts at the kiosk on Central Park South at Sixth Avenue; a credit card or photo I.D. is required to take out the audio equipment. Thursdays through Sundays, 10 to 3:30. For more information or for reservations, call the Public Art Fund, at 212-980-3942. Through Sept. 11. **ERLE LORAN:** Smithsonian Archives of American Art Research Center, 1285 Sixth Ave. 212-399-5015. Through Oct. 7. **JAMES TURRELL:** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through Sept. 24. **PETER WEGNER:** Lever House, 390 Park Ave., at 53rd St. Through Sept. 4.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

"LITTLE ODYSSEYS"
This show's epigram, cribbed from "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," describes the ocean as "an immense desert, where man is never lonely, for he feels life stirring on all sides." The life stirring in this show reveals the current penchant among young artists for the literary, surrealistic, and rococo. Rosson Crow's painting "Tapestry Room Aboard the Normandie" views seafaring life from a first-class cabin, while the supernatural is invoked by John Espinosa's geometric aluminum sculpture painted with constellations and purportedly filled with fifty gallons of water from the Bermuda Triangle. The most magical work in the show, however, is Charlie Callahan's simple, Zen-like fountain made from battered pieces of blue and orange foam collected from beaches in San Francisco. Through Aug. 26. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9889.)

SUMMER GROUP SHOW
An unthemed gathering of gallery artists reveals a particular nuance of the house sensibility, which might be described as "ephemera deluxe." Among the works are Kiki Smith's cast-bronze doilies; Fred Wilson's elaborate collection of drug paraphernalia, presented in a museum vitrine alongside a group of faux pre-Colombian artifacts; and Tara Donovan's cloud-shaped floor work constructed entirely from Scotch Tape. With Tim Hawkinson, James Siena, Michal Rovner, Keith Tyson, and Corban Walker. Through Aug. 25. (Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

Short List

GEERT GOIRIS: Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Aug. 23. **SOL LE WITT:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through Aug. 25. **BILL OWENS:** Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500. Through Sept. 24.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

JIM HODGES
We're familiar with camouflage for bodies, vehicles, or buildings—but for open space? Hodges's "Look and See" is a fifty-foot-long, nine-ton stainless-steel sculpture that reflects, refracts, and frames the space around it with big camo-patterned cutouts in black, white, and mirror-bright silver. Like most good public art, it intrigues without overwhelming or imposing. Rather than blocking off space or hampering visibility—as Richard Serra's infamous

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
KEEPING COMPANY

CHARLES MILLER

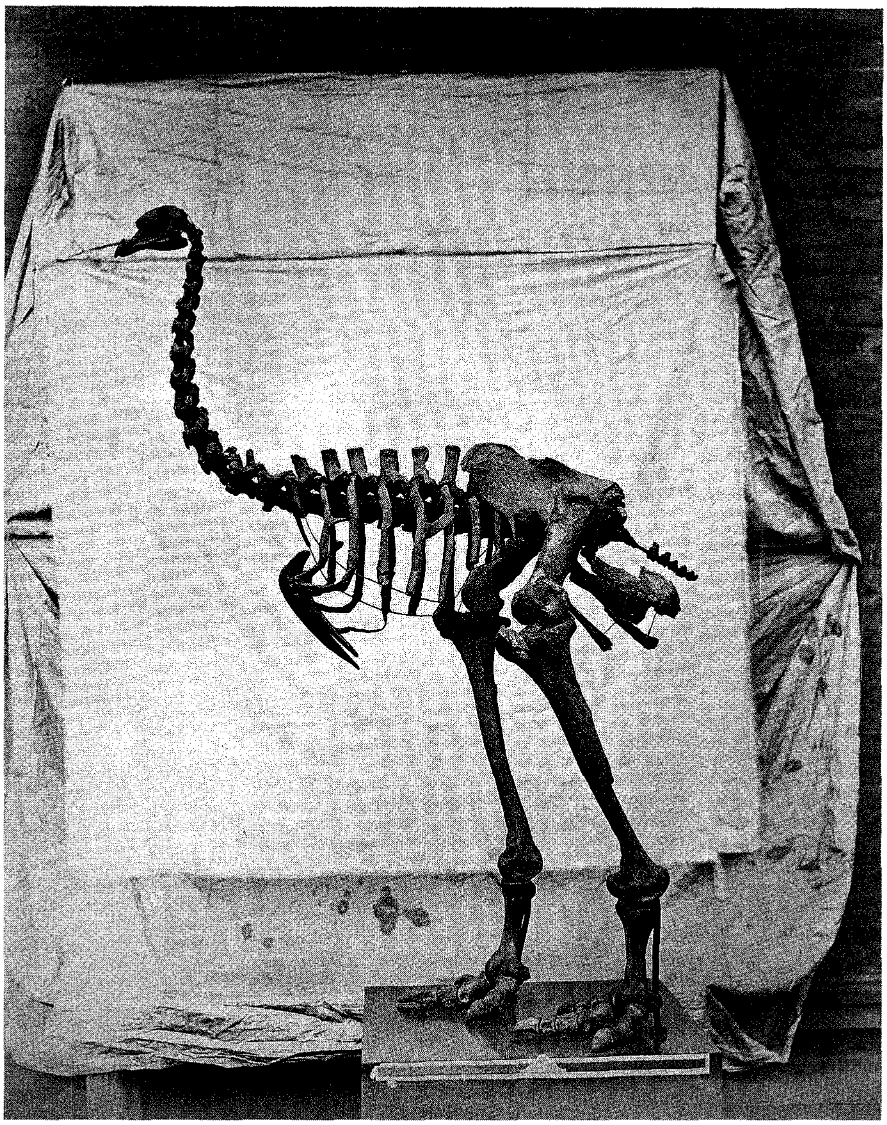
Paul Taylor usually makes sure that his company includes a small woman who can take the cute-little-sister role that figures in so many of his works, and when he hired Annmaria Mazzini, a short blonde, six years ago, he may have meant her for that slot. If so, he was mistaken. (He has since hired a shorter blonde.) Mazzini is not a dear little thing. She is a keen-eyed virtuoso dancer who can cross a stage in splits, meanwhile seeming to tell you the meaning of life. The whole company looks wonderful right now. Robert Kleinendorst is an extraordinary actor, so far gone into the cowpoke or fop he is playing that you wonder how he'll ever come back. Then there is Michael Trusnovec, the powerhouse. When a Taylor woman needs to hop around on a man's stomach—this is where little sister comes in—Trusnovec often does the duty. He is also, I think, the handsomest man in modern dance. You can see all of them when the troupe gives three free concerts in Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park, Aug. 18-20. The best program is on the 18th.

—*Joan Acocella*

"Tilted Arc" did at Federal Plaza—this curvy barrier is perforated and engaging; fun-house reflections of visitors mix with reconfigured views of the landscape. Through Oct. 30. (Creative Time's Art on the Plaza at the Ritz-Carlton, Battery Park City. 212-206-6674.)

Short List

MIKE BOUCHET: Maccarone, 45 Canal St. 212-431-4977. Through Aug. 28.



"Elephantine Moa," photographed by Roger Fenton in 1854, at the Met.

DANCE

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
Morris's "L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato," from 1988, is a monumental work, a late-twentieth-century masterpiece. In 2001, a glossy coffee-table book was dedicated entirely to celebrating this one modern-dance piece. It deserves such treatment. Handel's oratorio setting of Milton's poem brings out the best in the most musical of choreographers. This presentation, part of the company's twenty-fifth-anniversary season and also part of Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, features the Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted by Nicholas McGegan, aided by the Riverside Choral Society Chamber Singers. (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500. Aug. 18-20 at 8.)

HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO
The troupe's season at the Joyce includes Ohad Naharin's "Tabula Rasa" and Nacho Duato's "Gnawa," and also features a new piece by the group's artistic director, Jim Vincent: "Uniformity," choreographed to Vivaldi, David Lang, and rhythm and blues. More in the old mode are Daniel Ezralow's "SF/LB," set to Leonard Bernstein's "Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs," and Lar Lubovitch's "Love Stories," built on standards made fresh by Kurt Elling. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Aug. 17-19 at 8 and Aug. 20 at 2 and 8.)

"LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS"
The free, multidisciplinary festival, now celebrating its thirty-fifth year, begins its plein-air dance concerts this week. In its triumphant fiftieth-anniversary season, the Paul Taylor Dance Company presents three concerts in the Damrosch Park Band Shell, near Amsterdam Ave. and 62nd St., Aug. 18-20. Each work is a distinctive sample of one of the richest, deepest, and most diverse repertories in modern dance. ♦ Aug. 18 at 8: "Cloven Kingdom," "Company B," and "Promethean Fire." ♦ Aug. 19: "Arden Court," "Esplanade," and "Syzygy." ♦ Aug. 20 at 8: "Aureole," "3 Epitaphs," "Dante Variations," and "Piazzolla Caldera." On Aug. 20 at 5:45, in the Josie Robertson Plaza, on Columbus Ave. at 64th St., Arthur Aviles Typical Theatre unveils "Flow to the Groove," a paean to disco dancing commissioned by Lincoln Center. Veterans of the dance craze's Bronx beginnings reminisce in voice-over as dancers re-create seminal moments in disco history, with and without roller skates. On Aug. 23 at 5:30 in the Josie Robertson Plaza, the program "ChoreoQuest"—named for a Brooklyn-based dance organization sponsored by the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation—brings together five troupes, notably Ronald K. Brown/Evidence and Nathan Trice/Rituals. (For information, call 212-875-5766, or visit www.lincolncenter.org for full festival schedule. No tickets necessary.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
In the Ted Shawn Theatre, Gradimir Pankov's Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal returns to the festival with the U.S. premières of two precisely danced contemporary European works. Stijn Celis's "Noces" has a frenetic energy that matches Stravinsky's pulsating score: brides swivel their hips en masse while tuxedo-clad grooms bob and leap at high speed. Didy Veldman's "TooT," set to Shostakovich's Jazz Suite No. 2, unleashes circus-inspired characters on a grass-green stage. In the Doris Duke Studio, the German-born choreographer Johannes Wieland flaunts his daring, cerebral dance vision. His three-year-old company performs the arresting piece from 2002 "Tomorrow," in which dancers, alone or in groups, plunge their torsos into fishtanks and flail across the stage, illustrating shifting alliances between family members; and the recent work "Sediment," a fluently connected dance set to Bach's "Chaconne." The season also includes the world première of "Artificial," which has an original electronic sound score by Brooks Williams and features two dancers wrapped in cocoons, whose protective covering is slowly unravelled by their colleagues. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Les Grands Ballets: Aug. 17-19 at 8, Aug. 20 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 21 at 2. Wieland: Aug. 18-19 at 8:15, Aug. 20 at 2:15 and 8:15, and Aug. 21 at 5.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
"Traveling with Mozart" is the (very loose) theme of this year's series; home base is the reconfigured Avery Fisher Hall, which now offers seats behind the stage, a more intimate orchestral experience, and a richer and more appealing sound. Aug. 16-17 at 8: Since Mozart was Tchaikovsky's favorite composer, he'd probably be pleased to hear his Violin Concerto performed by the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra. Joshua Bell is the guest on a program conducted by the festival's music director, Louis Langrée, which also includes Schnittke's "Moz-Art à la Haydn" and Prokofiev's "Classical" Symphony. ♦ Aug. 19-20 at 8: Osmo Vänskä, whose brisk and demanding style has the members of the Minnesota Orchestra playing on the edge of their seats, takes the festival orchestra for a spin in his Mostly Mozart début, a program featuring the master's Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major (with Stephen Hough) along with music by Beethoven and Schubert (the "Great C Major" Symphony). (212-721-6500. For full schedule, see www.lincolncenter.org.)

COMPOSERSCOLLABORATIVE INC.: "SERIAL UNDERGROUND"
Jed Distler's latest downtown foray into new music is a suite of three programs at the Cornelia Street Café. Aug. 16-17 and Aug. 20: "The Gold Standard," a music-theatre work by Distler and the playwright Ed Schmidt ("The Last Supper") about a very disgruntled pianist. ♦ Aug. 18-19: The composer-actor Gerald Busby, a member of the Virgil Thomson circle at the Chelsea Hotel, performs in "The Monologuing Composer." ♦ Aug. 21: The festival's finale is a group performance of Terry Riley's "In C," featuring such musicians as Busby (on piano), the violinist Justine F. Chen, and the accordionist Rachelle Garniez. (29 Cornelia St. 212-663-1967. All shows are at 8:30.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA: "AFTERNOON ARIAS"
Georgia Jarman, a soprano who made an alluring star turn as Violetta this summer at Caramoor,

is one of several young singers who will offer excerpts from works (such as "Don Giovanni" and "La Bohème") to be featured in City Opera's upcoming season. The conductor Gerald Steichen accompanies them at the piano. (Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. Aug. 19 at 12:30. No tickets required.)

THE STONE: MUSIC BY LISA BIELAWA
This prominent young composer writes music that is ingeniously experimental and lyrically satisfying. The three pieces on her concert at John Zorn's intimate performance venue are based on texts by Kafka (played and sung simultaneously by the violinist Carla Kihlstedt), Pushkin (a solo-piano work inspired by "Eugene Onegin," performed by Andrew Armstrong), and Aeschylus. (Avenue C at 2nd St. Aug. 21 at 8 and 10. Tickets at the door.)

OUT OF TOWN

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
Aug. 17 at 7:30: Mozart's Quintet for Piano and Winds anchors a program that also includes Dvořák's Piano Trio in E Minor ("Dumky") and a work for wind quintet by the gifted young composer Kenji Bunch, "Changes of Phase"; the performers include the flutist Marya Martin and the cellist Edward Arron. (Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church.) ♦ Aug. 19 at 7:30: The String Quintet by Schubert and the String Octet by Mendelssohn are the twin pillars of the festival's final concert, featuring the Tokyo String Quartet's first violinist, Martin Beaver, and the New York Philharmonic's associate principal violist, Rebecca Young. (St. Andrew's Dune Church, Southampton, N.Y.) (631-537-6368.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
The Northeast's leading summer opera company, an expert purveyor of out-of-the-way repertory, presents its final performances of the season. Aug. 18 and Aug. 20 at 8: A double bill of Massenet's **"Le Portrait de Manon"** (with Theodore Baerg, Bruce Reed, Colin Ainsworth, and Kristine Winkler, conducted by Andrew Bisantz) and Poulenc's **"La Voix Humaine"** (with the winning soprano Amy Burton and with Stewart Robertson, the company's music director, conducting). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8 and Aug. 21 at 2: Tazewell Thompson's staging of Britten's last opera, **"Death in Venice,"** with William Burden singing the role of Aschenbach and David Pittsinger as the Traveller; Robertson conducts. ♦ Aug. 20 at 1:30 and Aug. 22 at 2: Tim Albery's production of Mozart's **"Così Fan Tutte,"** with wonderful performances by Anne-Sophie Duprels, Sandra Piques Eddy, Camille Zamora, John Tessier, Palle Knudsen, and Sanford Sylvan; Robertson. ♦ Aug. 23 at 2: Lillian Groag's production of Donizetti's **"Lucie de Lammermoor,"** the compact 1839 Paris version of "Lucia," boasts a worthy young cast, especially Sarah Coburn, Raúl Hernández, and Earle Patriarco in the leading roles; Beatrice Jona Affron. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

TANGLEWOOD
Aug. 18 at 8:30: The Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, masters of their brief, offer piano trios by Mozart, Brahms (the Trio in C Major, Op. 87), and Joan Tower ("For Daniel"). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8:30: Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra in a high-powered Russian program of Rachmaninoff (the "Paganini Rhapsody," with the pianist Garrick Ohlsson) and Rimsky-Korsakov ("Scheherazade"). ♦ Aug. 20 at 8:30: Marin Alsop, the new music-director designate of the Baltimore Symphony and a distinguished Tanglewood alumna, leads the B.S.O. in Christopher Rouse's "Rapture," Barber's Cello Concerto (with Yo-Yo Ma), and Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. ♦ Aug. 21 at 2:30: Peter Oundjian brings the Orchestra of St. Luke's to Boston's musical duchy, with Peter Serkin, a Tanglewood eminence, along for Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor; Oundjian also conducts music by Rossini and Beethoven (the Symphony No. 3, "Eroica"). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
Aug. 20 at 6: Steven Lubin, renowned for his interpretations on the fortepiano, moves to the modern Yamaha to offer "The Romantic Piano," a program of works by Beethoven (the "Moonlight" Sonata), Schumann, Schubert (the Sonata in A Major, D. 664), and Chopin (the Scherzo in B-Flat Minor). ♦ Aug. 21 at 3: Sundays are devoted to string quartets at the Maverick, but this week's group—the elegant and vital Borromeo String Quartet—is giving an unusual amount of exposure to the pianist Pedja Muzijevic, who will perform a selection of Grieg's "Lyric Pieces" before joining his colleagues in music by Fauré (the rarely played Piano Quintet No. 2 in C Minor) and Brahms (the Piano Quartet No. 2 in A Major). (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL
Leon Botstein's celebration of Aaron Copland—and of the multitude of composers who orbited around him—enters its final weekend of the summer. Here are some highlights. Aug. 20 at 8: "In Search of a New National Voice," a program focussing on seminal works from the nineteen-thirties, including Copland's "Statements" and "Billy the Kid" Suite, Barber's "First Essay," and Harris's Third Symphony; Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra. ♦ Aug. 21 at 1:30: In "Tanglewood and Postwar Tensions," the Bard Festival String Quartet, the soprano Courtenay Budd, the pianist Simone Dinnerstein, and other musicians offer a wide-ranging program that includes Copland's Piano Quartet (his first twelve-tone piece), the John Cage–Lou Harrison collaboration "Double Music," and vocal works by Britten, Rorem, and Del Tredici. ♦ Aug. 21 at 5: Botstein and the A.S.O. wrap things up with powerful orchestral works by Copland (the Symphony No. 3, "Inscape," and "Preamble for a Solemn Occasion," with Mia Farrow narrating), Cowell, Still, and Sessions (the Second Symphony, one of his finest works). (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. For full schedule, visit www.summerscape.bard.edu.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
The Arianna String Quartet performs quartets by Mozart and Beethoven (Op. 95, "Serioso") along with Dvořák's Piano Quintet (with Anton Nel). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 21 at 3.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE 40-YEAR-OLD VIRGIN
A comedy directed by Judd Apatow, about an electronics-superstore employee who has never had sex. With Steve Carell ("The Office") and Catherine Keener. Opening Aug. 19. (In wide release.)

KING OF THE CORNER
A comedy about a man who is confused about his life, until an unorthodox rabbi helps him turn it around. Directed by Peter Riegert, who also stars. With Isabella Rossellini, Eli Wallach, Rita Moreno, Beverly D'Angelo, and Eric Bogosian. Opening Aug. 21. (Metro Twin.)

RED EYE
Wes Craven directed this thriller, about a young woman (Rachel McAdams) on a night flight to Miami who gets caught up in an assassination plot. With Cillian Murphy and Brian Cox. Opening Aug. 19. (In wide release.)

REEL PARADISE
Steve James ("Hoop Dreams") directed this documentary, about a project undertaken by the indie-film producer John Pierson and his family, who move to Fiji and show free movies to local people. Opening Aug. 17. (IFC Center.)

SUPERCROSS
An action-adventure movie about two brothers who compete against each other in a high-stakes motocross competition. With Mike Vogel and Steve Howey. Opening Aug. 19. (In wide release.)

SYMPATHY FOR MR. VENGEANCE
In the first film in Park Chanwook's revenge trilogy, a young deaf man searches for a kidney for his ailing sister. In Korean. Opening Aug. 19. (Angelika Film Center.)

THIS DIVIDED STATE
A documentary directed by Steven Greenstreet, about the debate sparked when the filmmaker Michael Moore was invited to speak at a state-funded Utah college. Opening Aug. 19. (Quad Cinema.)

THE UNTOLD STORY OF EMMETT LOUIS TILL
Directed by Keith Beauchamp, this documentary investigates the murder of Emmett Till, in Mississippi in 1955, and its aftermath. Opening Aug. 17. (Film Forum.)

VALIANT
An animated drama about a misfit pigeon who wants to join England's Royal Pigeon Service during the Second World War. Voices by Ewan McGregor, Jim Broadbent, John Cleese, and Ricky Gervais. Opening Aug. 19. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

THE ARISTOCRATS
The title of the movie is the punch line to what was once a relatively simple dirty joke but has grown, like a fungus in a dark, damp cellar, into a notorious can-you-top-this improvisational challenge regarding a thoroughly unwholesome vaudeville family act. The filmmakers, Penn Jillette and Paul Provenza, got dozens of comics, writers, and club owners to tell the joke and talk about its history, other versions they've heard, its structure and ad-lib appeal. There are insights—and laughs—to be gleaned, along with observations about the workings of the comic mind and the state of obscenity in the current culture, but the joke itself doesn't quite stand up to all that analysis. With George Carlin, Bob Saget (hide the Olsen twins), Gilbert Gottfried, and many, many more.—*Ken Marks* (In wide release.)

ASYLUM
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

ATLANTIC CITY
This spa that became a racketeers' paradise during Prohibition and in 1981 was on its chaotic way to becoming Vegas with a beach is an improbable place, and in this lyric farce, directed by Louis Malle, from John Guare's script, it gives a hallucinatory texture to the lives of the characters. The story is a prankish wish-fulfillment fantasy about prosperity—what it does to cities, what it can do for people. It takes Malle a little while to set up the crisscrossing of ten or twelve major characters, but once he does, the film operates by its own laws in its own world, and it has a lovely fizziness. Everything goes wrong and comes out right. The casting is superb. As an old numbers runner who dreams of the days when he was a flunky and bodyguard for big-time racketeers, Burt Lancaster gives what is probably his funniest (and finest) performance. Susan Sarandon plays an uneducated girl studying to become a croupier, and for once her googly-eyed, slightly stupefied look seems perfect. With an appearance by Robert Goulet as himself.—*Pauline Kael* (Museum of Modern Art; Aug. 18 and Aug. 20.)

BROKEN FLOWERS
Jim Jarmusch linking up with Bill Murray is a case of Mr. Cool meeting Mr. Cool, and the resulting silences are deafening. Murray plays Don Johnston, who is allegedly an aging Don Juan. But Murray is so quiet and self-contained that he seems to want nothing. When he sets out on the road to visit the women he was dating twenty years ago, one of whom may have conceived a son with him, the movie turns into a kind of elegant alienated travelogue. The cinematographer, Frederick Elmes, produces an even, gray light that is quite handsome in a neutralizing way but also sobering and almost punitive—it says that the American banality in which the characters live is all there is. Some of the actresses Murray encounters do extremely well in their brief appearances, especially Sharon Stone, as a hard-luck blonde who doesn't demand too much from life, and Jessica Lange, as an iron-willed fraud who "talks to animals." Jarmusch is good at the evanescent emotions of lost love and unfulfilled lives, but the

movie is all gesture and unspoken longing. It's all of a piece, and well observed, but it's an art object without the energy or courage to be a work of art.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/8 & 15/05.) (In wide release.)

CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

In Tim Burton's adaptation of the book by Roald Dahl, Johnny Depp plays Willy Wonka and Freddie Highmore plays Charlie, who, having found one of five golden tickets hidden in a chocolate bar, wins a tour of Wonka's chocolate factory. Depp, as Wonka, dresses like Oscar Wilde, smiles like Michael Jackson, enunciates like Tootsie, and wears rubbery purple gloves to keep away the germs—and is far more of a child than the actual children around him. The movie is surprisingly unwild, though often astounding—Burton summons succulent and strange details such as a thunderous, cocoa-hued waterfall and bulging pink sheep that are sheared for their fleeces of cotton candy—but the eye, no less than the palate, is at first dizzied, then acclimatized, then jaded, and, finally, semi-sickened. To chide a movie that oozes so many gags may sound churlish, but you can't help feeling that a fantasist as accomplished as Burton can manage this kind of project with his eyes shut.—*Anthony Lane* (7/25/05) (In wide release.)

GRIZZLY MAN

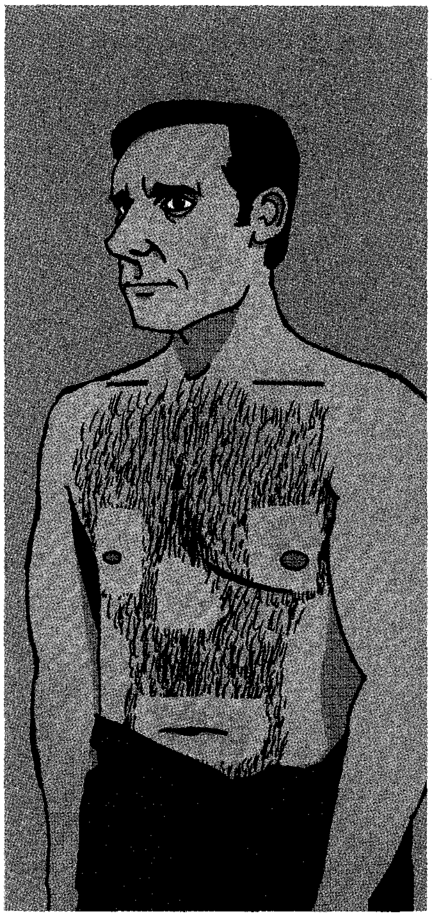
The indefatigable Werner Herzog has made a brilliant documentary about an American saint and fool—Timothy Treadwell, a failed actor and California surfer who fell in love with the grizzly bears in Alaska and who spent a dozen summers with the bears, usually alone and always unarmed. Treadwell gave the seven-hundred-pound beasts such names as Mr. Chocolate and Aunt Melissa and rhapsodized over their steaming excrement, which he insisted on calling poop. All was well in this peaceable kingdom until October, 2003, when Treadwell and his girlfriend, Amie Huguenard, were attacked and devoured by a hungry long-nosed grizzly. When the hundred hours of video footage that Treadwell shot in the last five years of his excursions fell into Herzog's hands, the German filmmaker interviewed Treadwell's friends, ex-girlfriends, and a variety of naturalists and park-service officers and wove the footage into a startling meditation on nature and innocence. Herzog is properly respectful of Treadwell's courage and manic self-invention, but he interprets the American as an impatient misfit who relieved his misanthropy with neurotic protestations of love in the wilderness. The tormented Treadwell longs for harmony and doesn't seem to understand that death is at the center of any ecological balance, but Herzog, it turns out, has his own philosophical burdens: he sees nothing but death in nature. Neither man, it seems, is willing to admit that a bear is a bear is a bear.—*D.D.* (8/8 & 15/05) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HAPPY ENDINGS

A complicated and excessively self-conscious mess that doesn't, in the end, add up to a lot but that has many affecting and funny moments along the way. Lisa Kudrow, teaming up again with the writer-director Don Roos (they made the tart "Opposite of Sex" in 1998), plays Mamie, a sardonic Los Angeles woman who gave up her son at birth and is being blackmailed by a chaotic young filmmaker (Jesse Bradford) who claims to know the name and whereabouts of the boy, now a teen-ager. In parallel stories, two gay men duel with a lesbian couple over the paternity of a baby, and a drifting young club singer and sex parasite (Maggie Gyllenhaal) seduces both a young gay man (Jason Ritter) and his wealthy widower father (Tom Arnold). Roos is trying to devise a shorthand method of unifying a whirl of narrative events, but he hasn't done the basic work of construction that would pull the stories together. Much of the writing is lively, however, and the actors are good—especially Gyllenhaal, who, as a very bad girl, has an irresistible smile.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

HUSTLE & FLOW

As DJay, a low-rent South Memphis pimp, Terrence Howard speaks in a soft, smoky voice that trails off into nowhere. His talkative hustler has the obscure, ruminative wit of an old bluesman; he turns his come-ons and rants into a sullen art. The movie asks whether that particular art is convertible yet again—whether DJay's hustle can be converted into the thumping flow of the Memphis-style rap known as crunk. Written and directed by Craig Brewer, this movie unfolds in the kind of awful heat that wilts any effort aimed at more than mere survival. With Ludacris as a Memphis rapper returning to his home town after having made his fortune in the music business; Taryn Manning, Taraji P. Henson, and Paula Jai Parker as DJay's women; Anthony Anderson as a sound engineer; and D. J. Qualls as a skinny white guy who knows how to lay down crunk's bass-heavy tracks.—*D.D.* (7/11 & 18/05) (In wide release.)



Steve Carell in "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," opening Aug. 19.

JASHAR AWAN

JUNEBUG

Meet the in-laws, North Carolina style. Phil Morrison's remarkably assured directorial début, about a cosmopolitan art dealer (Embeth Davidtz) who travels with her new husband (Alessandro Nivola) to his family home, is snarkily funny and unexpectedly moving. Set over a long weekend, the story (by Angus MacLachlan) focusses on the interaction between Davidtz's somewhat floundering character and the members of her husband's complex family. There's an unhurried attention to detail that Morrison brings to the story which allows the crisp dialogue and deep characterizations room to breathe. The various narrative strands—the domineering mother (Celia Weston) who favors one son over another, the chatterbox sister-in-law (a luminous Amy Adams) who hungers for connection—come together to form a contemplative picture of a surprisingly fragile Southern family.—*Bruce Diones* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

LAST DAYS

In Gus Van Sant's new film, Blake (Michael Pitt) is the lead singer and guitarist of an unnamed rock band, whose body is irredeemably silted up with drugs. In the course of the film, he goes for a walk, eludes company, and finally dies from a bad case of being himself. Any resemblance to the late Kurt Cobain is entirely coincidental. Van Sant refuses to go in fear of the long take, and much of the motion of this film has a hypnotizing grace. The most stubborn virtue of "Last Days" is its reluctance to gild its hero as a *poète maudit*; instead, he lies somewhere between a lost boy and a total pain. While Van Sant is hardly one of those fulminators who want rockers to go to Hell, neither, on the other hand, is his film in the business of sanctification. It merely hints that some people, gifted or otherwise, may have had enough.—*A.L.* (8/1/05) (In wide release.)

MARCH OF THE PENGUINS

The French wildlife filmmaker Luc Jacquet spent more than a year chronicling an emperor-penguin colony in Antarctica, and what he discovered was a touching, self-sacrificing ritual of parenthood. Trekking for miles through stunning ice-castle landscapes, Jacquet frames the penguins' mating cycle—from courtship through the birth and rearing of their newborns—as a severe and forbidding ballet that demonstrates the true meaning of survival and determination. Narrated by Morgan Freeman.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

MUST LOVE DOGS

It does have a pooch or two, though the writer-director, Gary David Goldberg, doesn't get much out of them—or out of anyone else, either. John Cusack, as a wryly ironic builder of wooden boats, has an easy way with romantic patter, but Diane Lane, as a divorcée, doesn't have the lightness or the sparkle for this kind of middle-aged-dating picture, and the romantic bond between them that would hold the picture together never really materializes. Goldberg sets the movie in anywhere-and-nowhere suburban kitchens and parks, and he likes to have a lot of people barging on and off the sets or just hanging around and talking. The formidable Christopher Plummer, as Lane's widowed dad, is reduced to a poetry-quoting old fart, though Stockard Channing, as one of Plummer's girlfriends, creates a character out of thin air.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

SAMURAI REBELLION

Set in the early eighteenth century, Masaki Kobayashi's stately yet subversive epic from 1967 dramatizes one warrior's personal revolution with black-and-white images that establish and then smash a courtly geometry. Toshiro Mifune spends the first half of the film in a state of impacted emotion as a samurai whose unswerving feudal loyalty has trapped him in a loveless marriage for twenty years. No one could seethe better than Mifune, but what gives the movie equal shares of exhilaration and heartbreak is the feeling that pours out of him when his son finds happiness in his marriage, to their lord's out-of-favor mistress—and Mifune refuses to return her when the lord wants her back. Yoko Tsukasa, as Mifune's daughter-in-law, conjures an extraordinary mix of suppleness and spine, and Kobayashi's favorite star, Tatsuya Nakadai, brings surprisingly plangent, potent sentiments to the pivotal role of Mifune's best friend; in just a few scenes, he manages to embody all the contradictions of his era. In Japanese.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Aug. 19-23.)

SKY HIGH

One of Disney's biggest former child stars, Kurt Russell (who began his career there in 1966 with the Boy Scout comedy "Follow Me, Boys!") returns to his roots in this delightful family film. Showing a warmth and humor that's over-the-top engaging, Russell plays the father of a superhero family whose son (a lively Michael Angarano) is having a tough time in a high school that caters to superpowered teens. The film, though filled with special effects, is a cheerful throwback to the simple stories of earlier Disney fare—a friendly, brightly lit coming-of-age story that teaches life lessons in building confidence and trusting oneself.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

2046
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

TONY TAKITANI
Jun Ichikawa's lovely, meditative adaptation of a Haruki Murakami story (which appeared in this magazine three years ago) gets off to a slow start—the camera pans over nearly still images as a voice-over explains that Tony's mother died in childbirth, leaving him with his peripatetic jazz-musician father (Issei Ogata), who essentially abandoned him. But things pick up when the adult Tony (also played by Ogata), a technical illustrator who has grown up thinking nothing of his isolated existence, meets Eiko (Rie Miyazawa), a sweet young woman with an insatiable lust for couture clothing. They marry, and Tony becomes terrified of being alone again. But Tony wants not just a wife but a perfect wife, and when he innocently asks her to curb her expensive obsession, she tries to please him, to a horrible end. Ogata plays both of his characters with a careful subtlety, and breaks through the film's doleful tone with a coy charm. When Tony hires an assistant (played by Miyazawa) and asks her to wear the clothes his wife left behind, her dire response venerates Tony's dead wife, and reminds him to go on living. In Japanese.—*Shauna Lyon* (Quad Cinema.)

WEDDING CRASHERS
Jeremy (Vince Vaughn) and John (Owen Wilson), a pair of divorce mediators, spend their summer weekends rolling up to the weddings of people they don't know and becoming the life and soul of the party. The director, David Dobkin, and the writers, Steve Faber and Bob Fisher, kick off with a hectic montage of good will, and the first twenty minutes are rabid with simple pleasure. Then Jeremy and John hit a swish society affair, in which the Treasury Secretary, William Cleary (Christopher Walken), is marrying off one of his daughters, leaving two more (Rachel McAdams and Isla Fisher) to be ogled by our heroes, whereupon the fizz—and the generosity—starts to leak away. Thank heaven for the leading men—especially Vaughn, a hopped-up Gary Cooper who shoots his mouth off with such scattershot brio that he flubs the occasional word, or picks an overheated one ("Erroneous! Erroneous!"), or forgets to pause for breath. This is a dumb-ass picture about dumb-ass men. Still, sometimes ten per cent of your brain is just enough.—*A.L.* (7/25/05) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE DUKES OF HAZZARD: In wide release. **THE GREAT RAID:** In wide release. **MAD HOT BALLROOM:** In wide release. **MURDERBALL:** Sunshine Cinema. **PRETTY PERSUASION:** Chelsea Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema. **THE SKELETON KEY:** In wide release. **WAR OF THE WORLDS:** In wide release.

POP NOTES
FUZZY THINKING

To doctors and teen-agers, the word "psychedelic" refers to mental states associated with a certain class of drug. In rock music, "psychedelic" indicates recordings from the nineteen-sixties filled with trebly, fuzzy electric guitars and woozy harmonies sung in a secular but vaguely ecstatic style. Citified types sometimes find this music a bit digressive, and there's a standing presumption that it's past its sell-by date, but the twenty-four-year-old Swedish musician Gustav Ejstes has found a way to channel the qualities of the genre into a user-friendly, melodic whole that does not feel like a pathetic trek back to Woodstock. Performing under the name Dungen (which translates as "Cluster of Trees"), Ejstes recorded **"Ta det Lugnt"** ("Grab the Calm") almost entirely by himself in a house on his mother's farm in 2003; the album was released in Sweden in 2004 and now comes to America courtesy of the Kemado label. Dungen's pastoral origins are not merely circumstantial—Ejstes makes very loud instruments sound soft and woodsy—and the album has an easygoing rapture that has made it popular both in its native country and internationally. If you can speak Swedish, you will hear lyrics about, among other things, love and a brand of Swedish pop fan known as the "Panda" (white makeup and black hair). If you can't, you will hear songs so warm they've begun to bend. Dungen sounds a bit like Jimi Hendrix, had Hendrix been a little more, you know, Swedish. Ejstes is a fluid, expressive drummer, and his friend Reine Fiske plays convincingly unhinged guitar solos. Though Dungen's music shares psychedelic rock's habit of wandering into open-ended instrumental valleys, these explorations are generally fruitful, and Ejstes's hooks and harmonies are closer to the spirit of sixties pop acts such as the Move or the Pretty Things than any outré jazz or performance art. At a recent performance in New York, Ejstes played the songs from "Ta det Lugnt"on acoustic guitar and violin, accompanied only by his girlfriend, Kajsa Zetterlund, also a violinist. Stripped of the fuzz and cavorting drums, the songs were still distinct and charming, and Ejstes—who smiled sweetly and had hair and a beard straight out of "Jesus Christ Superstar"—supplied strong vocals. If there is any looseness implied by the term "psychedelic rock," Dungen is psychedelic only in feel, not content. Ejstes may be calm, but he's not nodding off.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"New Filmmakers." Aug. 17 at 8: "The Instrument" (2005, Adam Nemett). ♦ Aug. 17-18 at 7:30: "Lost, Lost, Lost" (1976, Jonas Mekas). ♦ "Goethe-Institut Presents." Aug. 18 at 7:30: "Asphalt" (1929, Joe May; silent). ♦ New York theatrical première. Aug. 19-23 at 7 and 9 and Aug. 20-21 at 5: "Pound," director's cut (1970, Robert Downey). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Aug. 18 at 6: A program of films by Sidney Peterson (1946-49). ♦ Aug. 20 at 6: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French). ♦ Aug. 20 at 8:30: Short films by Ron Rice, Hans Richter, and Paul Sharits (1921-76). ♦ Aug. 21 at 5:30: "The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man" (1963, Ron Rice). ♦ Aug. 21 at 8: "Senseless" (1962, Rice) and "The Flower Thief" (1960, Rice).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Cinema Tropical." Aug. 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Felicidades" (2000, Lucho Bender; in Spanish and Hebrew). ♦ "BAMcinématek Favorites: Sneak Preview." Aug. 18 at 7: "Ferpect Crime" (2004, Álex de la Iglesia; in Spanish). ♦ "Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: The Shaw Brothers." Aug. 19 at 6:50 and 9:15: "One-Armed Swordsman" (1967, Chang Cheh; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 20 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The 36th Chamber of Shaolin" (1978, Liu Chia-Liang; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 21 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Blood Brothers" (1973, Chang; in Cantonese and Mandarin). ♦ "Lonely Heart: Philippe Garrel." Aug. 22 at 6:50 and 9:15: "High Loneliness" (1974, Garrel; in French). ♦ Aug. 23 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Phantom Heart" (1996, Garrel; in French).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Special screenings. Aug. 17-18 at 1:20, 5:10, and 9: "Cobra Woman" (1944, Robert Siodmak). ♦ Aug. 17-18 at 3:10 and 7: "The Gang's All Here" (1943, Busby Berkeley). ♦ "Summer Samurai." Aug. 19-23 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Samurai Rebellion" (†).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." Aug. 19-20: "After Hours" (1985, Martin Scorsese). ♦ "Weekend Classics." Aug. 21-22 at noon: "Late Autumn" (1960, Yasujiro Ozu; in Japanese).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Miramax: 25 Years." Aug. 17 at 6: "Swingers" (1996, Doug Liman). ♦ Aug. 17 at 8: "Bride and Prejudice" (2004, Gurinder Chadha). ♦ Aug. 17 at 8:15: "The Grifters" (1990; Stephen Frears). ♦ Aug. 19 at 6: "Kill Bill—Vol. 1" (2003, Quentin Tarantino). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8: "In the Bedroom" (2001, Todd Field). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8:15: "Kill Bill—Vol. 2" (2004, Tarantino). ♦ Aug. 20 at 1: "The English Patient" (1996, Anthony Minghella). ♦ Aug. 21 at 2: "The Crow" (1994, Alex Proyas). ♦ Aug. 21 at 5: "Mimic" (1997, Guillermo Del Toro). ♦ Aug. 22 at 5: "The Aviator" (2004, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Aug. 22 at 8:15: "Good Will Hunting" (1997, Gus Van Sant). ♦ Through Aug. 31: "New Work/New Acquisitions." Aug. 17 at 6: "La Trilogie des Amours" (1999-2003, Laurence Attali; in French). ♦ Aug. 18 at 6 and Aug. 22 at 8:15: "Requiem for a Dream" (2000, Darren Aronofsky). ♦ Aug. 18 at 6 : "Light Is Calling" (2003, Bill Morrison), "The Mesmerist" (2003, Morrison), and "Love Is a Treasure" (2002, Eija-Liisa Ahtila; in Finnish). ♦ Aug. 19 at 6: "Black Tape: The Videotape Fariborz Kamkari Found in the Garbage" (2002, Fariborz Kamkari; in Farsi). ♦ Aug. 20 at 6:30: "My Architect" (2003, Nathaniel Kahn). ♦ "112 Years of Cinema." Aug. 18 at 8 and Aug. 20 at 8:45: "Atlantic City" (†). ♦ Aug. 18 at 8:30: "Escape from Alcatraz" (1979, Don Siegel). ♦ Aug. 22 at 6: "Bike Boy" (1967, Andy Warhol). ♦ "Stars and Stripes on Screen: Sixty Years After World War." Aug. 20 at 12:30: "The Pacific Theater," a program of films including "The Battle of Midway" (1942, John Ford). ♦ Aug. 20 at 3:15: "The European Theater," a program of films including "Memphis Belle" (1944, William Wyler) and "The Battle of San Pietro" (1945, John Huston). ♦ Aug. 20 at 6: "Aftermath in Japan and America," a program of films including "Let There Be Light" (1946, Huston). ♦ Aug. 20 at 8:30: "Nuremberg" (1948, Pare Lorentz; in English and German). ♦ Aug. 21 at 12:30: "Why We Fight," a program of films by Frank Capra (1942-45). ♦ "Newly Preserved." Aug. 20 at 4:30: "Weddings and Babies" (1958, Morris Engel).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Outdoor Cinema" (at Socrates Sculpture Park, on Broadway at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City). Aug. 17 at 7: "Central Station" (1998, Walter Salles; in Portuguese). ♦ "Black Light: Films from the African Diaspora." Aug. 19 at 7:30: "The Robin Harris Story: We Don't Die, We Multiply" (2004, Topper Carew). ♦ A Raoul Walsh retrospective. Aug. 20 at 2: "Captain Horatio Hornblower" (1951). ♦ Aug. 20-21 at 4:15: "White Heat" (1949). ♦ Aug. 21 at 2: "The Lawless Breed"

(1953). ♦ Repertory nights. Aug. 20-21 at 6:30: "The Last Laugh" (1924, F. W. Murnau; silent).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Aug. 19-20: "Mallrats" (1995, Kevin Smith).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Divas!" Aug. 20 at 6 and Aug. 23 at 7:45: "Bus Stop" (1956, Joshua Logan). ♦ Aug. 20 at 8 and Aug. 23 at 6: "Twentieth Century" (1934, Howard Hawks).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Dedication and Discovery: 15 Years of Milestone Films." Aug. 17 at 1:30 and 9:50 and Aug. 18 at 4:35: "Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell and Kenyon" (1900-13, Mitchell & Kenyon). ♦ Aug. 17 at 7:30 and Aug. 18 at 2: "Winter Soldier" (1972, Winterfilm Collective). ♦ Aug. 17 at 3 and Aug. 18 at 6:15: "The Troubles We've Seen: A History of Journalism in Wartime" (1994, Max Ophüls; in French). ♦ Through Aug. 31: "I Love to Singa: Cartoon Musicals." Aug. 19 at 1 and Aug. 21 at 8:30: "Iwerks by Design," a program of short cartoons (1928-37). ♦ Aug. 19 and 21 at 3:30 and Aug. 20 at 5:30: "'Sillies' and Other Symphonies," a program of short cartoons. ♦ Aug. 19 at 6 and Aug. 20 at 3 and 8: "Musical Mice," a program of short cartoons (1931-37). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8:15 and Aug. 21 at 1: "Fantasia" (1940, James Algar). ♦ Aug. 20 at 1: "Allegro Non Troppo" (1977, Bruno Bozzetto; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 22-23 at 1: "The MGM (Cartoon) Musical," a program of short cartoons (1934-54). ♦ Aug. 22 at 3:30: "The Triplets of Belleville" (2003, Sylvain Chomet; in French). ♦ New York première. Aug. 21 at 6: "Red vs. Blue: The Blood Gulch Chronicles, Season Three" (2005, Burnie Burns).

READINGS AND TALKS

STEVEN A. SHAW
Shaw, a lawyer turned food writer and a founder of the culinary Web site eGullet.org, talks about his new book, "Turning the Tables," which takes an affectionate look at the restaurant business. (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 66th St. No tickets necessary. Aug. 18 at 7.)

FORT GREENE PARK SUMMER LITERARY FESTIVAL
Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, and Carl Hancock Rux give alfresco performances. (DeKalb Ave. at Fort Greene Pl., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-398-2883. Aug. 20 at 4:30.)

OPIUM MAGAZINE
The four-year-old humor Web site celebrates the publication of its first print edition, with readings by Pia Z. Ehrhardt, Todd Zuniga, David Barringer, and other contributors. An autographed toaster is one of the door prizes. (Happy Ending, 302 Broome St. 212-334-9676. For more information, visit www.opiummagazine.com. Aug. 20 at 7:30.)

"CAPTURED"
Clayton Patterson, the editor of the newly published book "Captured: A Film/Video History of the Lower East Side," joins Taylor Mead, Penny Arcade, Jonas Mekas, and other contributors for a discussion and book-launch party. (Clayton Gallery, 161 Essex St. No tickets necessary. Aug. 22 at 7.)

BRET EASTON ELLIS
The writer, best known for "Less Than Zero" and "American Psycho," reads from and discusses his latest novel, "Lunar Park," which features the author himself as a character. (Coliseum Books, 11 W. 42nd St. No tickets necessary. Aug. 23 at 6:30.)

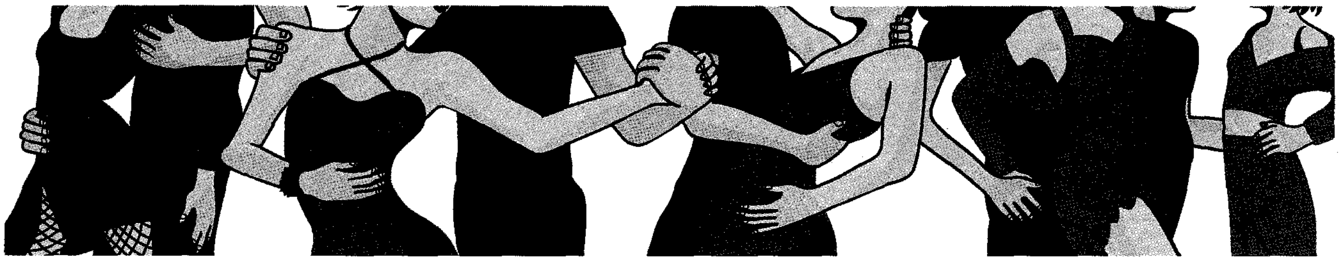
ABOVE AND BEYOND

"A COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS"
The New York Shakespeare Festival/Public Theatre marks its fiftieth anniversary with an exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts that features video clips, costumes, posters, scripts, and other relics from hits like "A Chorus Line" and "Hair," along with papers belonging to the institution's founder, Joseph Papp. (40 Lincoln Center Plaza. For information, call 212-870-1630 or visit www.nypl.org. Through Oct. 15.)

CENTRAL PARK TOUR
Big Onion Walking Tours leads a stroll past such points of interest as the Sheep Meadow, Belvedere Castle, the Ramble, and Seneca Village, the long-buried African-American settlement that was recently examined by archeologists using ground-penetrating radar. (For more information, call 212-439-1090. Aug. 19 at 1.)

ROLLER DERBY
It's Gotham against the Midwest, as members of the Manhattan Mayhem, Queens of Pain, and Brooklyn Bombshells face the Dairyland Dolls, of Madison, Wisconsin. Fans who get overexcited by the match can cool their heels during the open-skate after-party. (Skate Key, 220 E. 138th St., the Bronx. For more information, visit www.gothamgirlsrollerderby.com. Aug. 19 at 8:30.)

"HOWL! 2005"
The countercultural arts festival in the East Village includes more than two hundred theatre, dance, film, and concert events, along with numerous celebrations of Allen Ginsberg's poem, on the fiftieth anniversary of its creation. (For complete schedule, visit www.howlfestival.com. Aug. 21-28.)



MAXIMILIAN BODE

ON THE HORIZON

ART
PORTRAIT GALLERY
Sept. 8

The Edwynn Houk gallery and the new Steven Kasher gallery will simultaneously host the first-ever shows of vintage prints by the self-taught American photographer who christened himself Michael Disfarmer (1884-1959) and shot all his immaculately lit portraits out of a storefront studio in Heber Springs, Arkansas. Each show will be accompanied by a book. (Houk, 212-750-7070; Kasher, 212-966-3978.)

NIGHT LIFE
EXTRA HOT
Sept. 10

The New York Salsa Festival celebrates its thirtieth anniversary at Madison Square Garden with an all-star lineup featuring Victor Manuelle, India, Tito Rojas, Oscar D'Leon, Sonora Poncena, N'Klabe, and many others. (212-307-7171.)

DANCE
MERCE ALFRESCO
Sept. 16

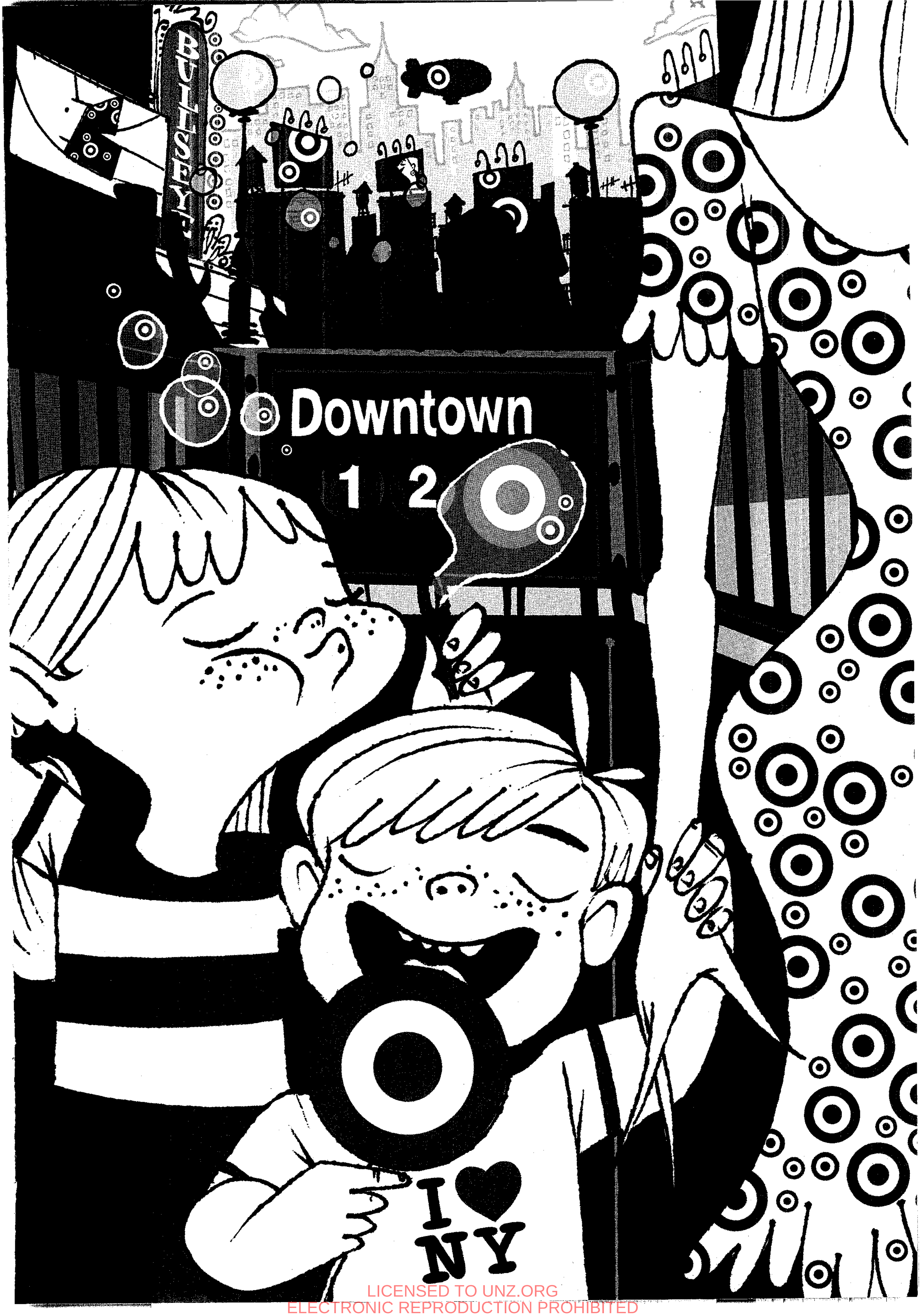
As part of the "Evening Stars" program of free music and dance in Battery Park City, Merce Cunningham Dance Company performs a new sixty-minute site-specific work set to live music by Takehesa Kosugi, David Behrman, Marina Rosenfeld, George Lewis, and John King. (For information, visit www.lmcc.net.)

READINGS AND TALKS
STRANGE DAYS
Sept. 19

The graphic novelist Neil Gaiman has long been a fan of the author Susanna Clarke; he championed her work on his Web site well before her first novel, "Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell," became a best-seller. The two inaugurate the fall literary season at Symphony Space with a discussion of their work. (212-864-5400.)

THE THEATRE
MURDER MYSTERY
Sept. 20

Taye Diggs, Steve Pasquale, James McDaniel, and Anthony Mackie star in a revival of "A Soldier's Play," Charles Fuller's Pulitzer-winning drama from 1981 about a death on a Louisiana army base during the Second World War. The original production featured Samuel L. Jackson and Denzel Washington. The show opens Oct. 17. (212-246-4422.)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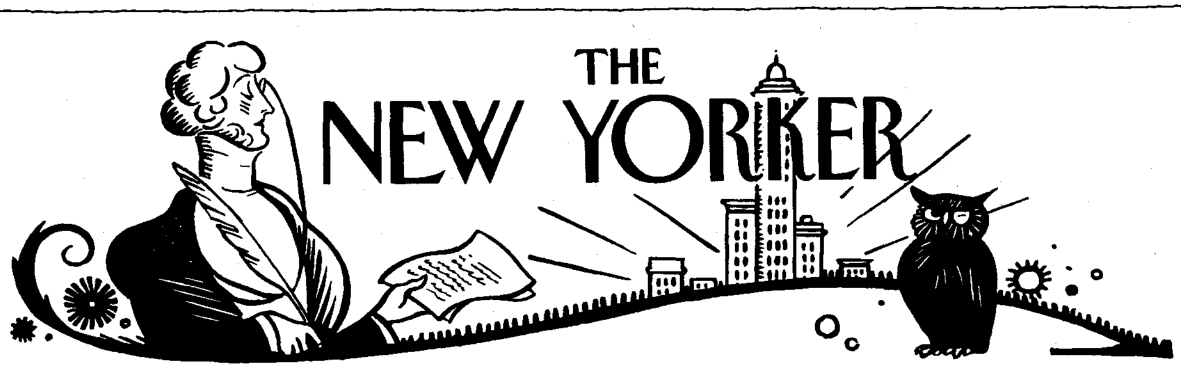
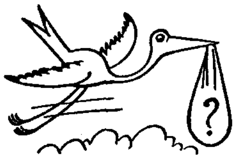


THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MIRED



How did we—not just Americans but human beings in general—come to be? Opinions differ, but for most of recorded history the consensus view was that people were made out of mud. Also, that the mud was originally turned into people by a being or beings who themselves resembled people, only bigger, more powerful, and longer-lived, often immortal. The early Chinese theorized that a lonely goddess, pining for company, used yellow mud to fashion the first humans. According to the ancient Greeks, Prometheus sculpted the first man from mud, after which Athena breathed life into him. Mud is the man-making material in the creation stories of Mesopotamian city-states, African tribes, and American Indian nations.

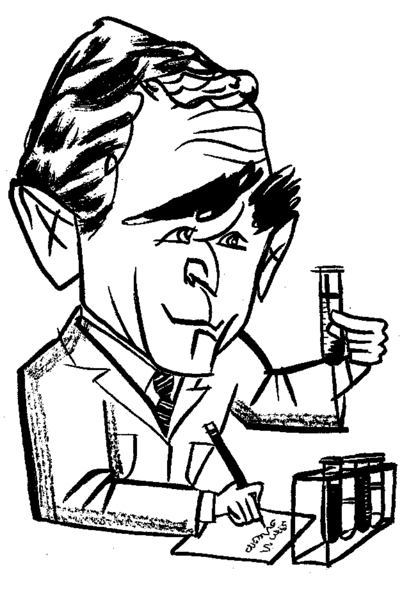
The mud theory is still dominant in the United States, in the form of the Book of Genesis, whose version of the origin of our species, according to a recent Gallup poll, is deemed true by forty-five per cent of the American public. Chapter 2, in verses 6 and 7, puts it this way:

> But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.
>
> And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Mud is not mentioned by name, but you'd have to be a pretty strict Biblical literalist not to infer that mud is what you get when you add water to dust.

A competing theory is that people, along with the rest of the earth's animals and plants, evolved over billions of years, beginning as extremely simple organisms and, via the accumulation of the tiny fraction of random mutations that turn out to be useful, developing into more complex ones. This view has gained many adherents since it was conceived, a century and a half ago, by Charles Darwin. It commands solid majorities in most of the developed world, and, thanks to the overwhelming evidence for its validity, has the near-unanimous support of scientists everywhere. Here in the United States, according to Gallup, it is subscribed to by about one-third of the populace—still running second to mud, but too large a market share to ignore altogether, especially in some of the battleground states.



On the one hand this, on the other hand that. George W. Bush is not normally the type to endorse shilly-shallying, but this time he went for it. At a "round table" with Texas reporters, the President was asked to comment on "what seems to be a growing debate over evolution versus intelligent design" and whether "both should be taught in public schools."

> THE PRESIDENT: I think—as I said, harking back to my days as my governor—both you and Herman are doing a fine job of dragging me back to the past. (Laughter.) Then, I said that, first of all, that decision should be made to local school districts, but I felt like both sides ought to be properly taught.
>
> Q: Both sides should be properly taught?
>
> THE PRESIDENT: Yes, people—so people can understand what the debate is about.
>
> Q: So the answer accepts the validity of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution?
>
> THE PRESIDENT: I think that part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought, and I'm not suggesting—you're asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, and the answer is yes.

Looked at one way, this colloquy is an occasion for national shame, albeit with a whiff of the risible: here is our country's leader, the champion-in-chief of educational standards, blandly equating natural science and supernatural supposition as "different schools of thought." Looked at another way, it represents progress of a sort. Twenty-five years ago, Ronald Reagan, then the Republican candidate for President, endorsed the teaching of "creationism"; five years ago, George W. Bush did the same. "Creationism" holds that dinosaurs and people coexisted, and that the fossil record is a product of Noah's flood. Next to that, "intelligent design" represents a scientific advance, or a tactical retreat, or maybe just the evolutionary process at work. I.D. recognizes that the age of the universe is measured in billions, not thousands, of years; that fossils are evidence, not divine tricks to test believers' faith; and that organisms change over time, sometimes via natural selection. This is tantamount to an admission that the Genesis story is poetry, not history; allegory, not fact.

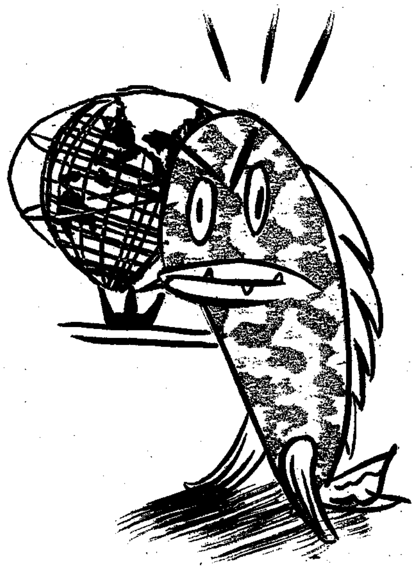
But I.D.—whose central (and easily refuted) talking point is that certain structures of living things are too intricate to have evolved without the intervention of an "intelligent designer" (and You know who You are)—enjoys virtually no scientific support. It is not even a theory, in the scientific sense, because it is untestable and unsupportable by empirical evidence. It is a last-ditch skirmish in a misguided war against reason that cannot be won and, for religion's sake as well as science's, should not be fought. If the President's musings on it were an isolated crotchet, they would hardly be worth noting, let alone getting exercised about. But they're not. They reflect an attitude toward science that has infected every corner of his Administration. From the beginning, the Bush White House has treated science as a nuisance and scientists as an interest group—one that, because it lies outside the governing conservative coalition, need not be indulged. That's why the White House—sometimes in the service of political Christianism or ideological fetishism, more often in obeisance to baser interests like the petroleum, pharmaceutical, and defense industries—has altered, suppressed, or overriden scientific findings on global warming; missile defense; H.I.V./AIDS; pollution from industrial farming and oil drilling; forest management and endangered species; environmental health, including lead and mercury poisoning in children and safety standards for drinking water; and non-abstinence methods of birth control and sexually-transmitted-disease prevention. It has grossly misled the public on the number of stem-cell lines available for research. It has appointed unqualified ideologues to scientific advisory committees and has forced out scientists who persist in pointing out inconvenient facts. All this and more has been amply documented in reports from congressional Democrats and the Union of Concerned Scientists, in such leading scientific publications as *Nature*, *Scientific American*, *Science*, and *The Lancet*, and in a new book, "The Republican War on Science," by the science journalist Chris Mooney.

Mooney's book is more judicious than its move-product title, which, as he acknowledges in an opening chapter, is not meant to apply to moderate Republicans past (such as Dwight D. Eisenhower) or present (such as John McCain). Anyway, a few small fissures are beginning to appear in the stone wall. Bill Frist, M.D., the Senate Majority Leader, has broken with the White House on stem-cell research. The White House science adviser, John H. Marburger III, evidently embarrassed by his boss's evolutionary equivocations, told the *Times* that "intelligent design is not a scientific concept." And the cover story in the current *National Journal*, a well-informed and relentlessly nonpartisan Washington weekly, reports that growing numbers of Republican politicians and corporate chieftains "who once dismissed as unproven the idea that the burning of fossil fuels is causing a harmful rise in Earth's temperature have now concluded that global warming is real—and very dangerous." As a result, the magazine says, "Advocates of muscular governmental efforts to slow or reverse global warming predict that the United States will eventually take strong action—but they doubt that such action will come on Bush's watch." In this White House, science's name is mud. And, unlike those intelligent designers in the sky, all this crowd knows how to do is sling it.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

GONE FISHING
SNAKEHEAD, THE SEQUEL

The news the other day that the snakehead fish, voracious pond-dominator and alleged traverser of dry land, had turned up in local waters was generally bad, at least for the other fish (and frogs, turtles, and perhaps even fowl) now destined to be devoured by it. But still: *snakehead!* Who can deny experiencing a little thrill? Three years ago, sightings in Maryland, in a pond behind a Dunkin' Donuts, inspired ominous scenarios; capable (it was said) of walking, or at least of propelling itself along the ground, with its pectoral fins, the snakehead would stride from waterway to waterway, leaving a blighted continent in its wake. Instead, the scare subsided, and, well, the walking thing sort of turned out not to be entirely true.



Snakehead, in Queens

But now the snakehead—the northern snakehead, *Channa argus*, which is native to Asia—has come to New York City, by what conveyance no one knows. Scientists with the state Department of Environmental Conservation recently netted five of them in Meadow Lake, in Flushing, Queens, during a routine survey. The picture in the paper, of two torpedo-shaped carcasses laid out next to measuring tape, called to mind mug shots of criminals you've come to root for. It didn't take long for a fisherman or two to start trying to think like a snakehead.

"I'm gonna bring some earthworms," Edwin Valentin, a master flytier at Urban Angler, on Fifth Avenue, said last week, after being persuaded to serve as Quint in a Queens-bound party of three. (Gary Ford, of Fort Greene, furniture-maker and saltwater fisherman, was guy No. 3.) Valentin lives in Bushwick and has been plying these metropolitan waters for more than thirty years. His only experience catching snakeheads is on PlayStation.

The crew convened early Thursday morning at dawn, in the parking lot of the Queens Museum, and proceeded to the northeastern corner of Meadow Lake, a vast but shallow man-made pan of brackish green water, bounded by expressways. The shore was littered with duck feathers, bottle caps, chicken bones, hot-sauce packets, car parts, and coconut shells. Fishing was prohibited, but the only Parks people around were landscapers jousting each other with weed whackers.

A halfhearted chumming effort (a doughnut, a fish stick) brought forth no surface activity. Valentin and Ford rigged up. "I'll try a white grub," Valentin said, tying on a wormy lure. "Here we go." He cast into the lake, reeled, then cast again. A bend in the rod indicated a strike: garbage bag, the first of many. The line snapped. In this way, perhaps, the snakeheads, without lifting a pectoral fin, could wipe out the entire population of Valentin's tackle box.

A man's fitness for fishing is determined in large part by his ability to stave off boredom. In this regard, Valentin was very fit. "If you get pissed off real quick, fishing's not your game," he said. "Shit, snagged again." He had failed to round up real worms ("My fucking brother," he explained. "I told him, get the worms ready, but he fell asleep on me"), so Ford dug in the sulfurous mud along the shoreline, in search of something slimy. "These are bloodthirsty fish we're after," he said. "They don't want a lure." Finding nothing but a heap of maggots ("This used to be a sportsman's paradise," he muttered), he wandered over to a low bridge spanning a channel where the water oozed out of the lake, toward Flushing Bay. He looked down into the murk. It was full of minnows and turtles. He was joined on the bridge by a stocky gentleman who reported having seen a big round head come to the surface. Definitely not a turtle. "I thought it was a piece of wood, but then I said, Hell, no, that's a—a—a *snakefish*." Valentin was summoned, and he and Ford began fishing from the bridge.

"I think this is where a snakehead would be," Valentin said, casting into the phragmites at the water's edge. Another fisherman, in camouflage chest-waders, came stumbling into view, thigh deep in the lake, trailing black mud. As bait he had a live goldfish impaled on a hook. For the next half hour, the three men fished hard in the heat, catching nothing but garbage. "We've used plastic, poppers, worms—and zero," Valentin said. "If there were a lot of snakeheads, like they said, we would've caught one." Despair had taken hold. One last desultory cast. "Whoa, big head right there! What the heck was that?"

The men fixed their attention on a strange minnow. It was bigger than the others, and less nimble—maimed, perhaps. Its pectoral fins were doing all the work. A theory emerged that it might be a baby snakehead. Ford attached a Styrofoam coffee cup to a hook and tried to scoop it up. Valentin tried to snag it with a lure. This went on for some time. "Got it?" "Damn." "Almost." "Try again." "He's hurt, but he ain't dumb."

Suddenly, a fish the size of a man's arm, as long and as narrow, came shooting out from under the bridge. It leaped clear of the water and rocketed through the air, then skipped once off the surface and disappeared. The men shrieked. "That was the fish!" Valentin said. "That was a snakehead! That was a snakehead! That was a big mama!" No question. Two feet long, everyone agreed. At least.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

CLOSE READING DEPT.

O.B.L.

Bruce Lawrence, a professor of Islamic studies at Duke University, lives near Durham, North Carolina, with his wife, Miriam Cooke, a scholar of modern Arabic literature. "Our house is on a hill, and we have a guesthouse-library that we use as a retreat," he said the other day. "We sit up there a couple of nights a week, and we meditate and sometimes we read poetry aloud. I'll say, 'Let's read some of what we're working on,' and then I'll read some of the stuff from O.B.L.'"

By "O.B.L.," Lawrence means Osama bin Laden. By "stuff," he means bin Laden's speeches, interviews, and statements. Lawrence, a respected Arabist, has agreed, at the request of Verso Books, to edit and write an introduction to "Messages to the World," a compendium of bin Laden's communiqués from 1994 to 2004. (This is the first time that the major texts will be available in English in their entirety.) In November, Verso—an independent-press known for publishing leftist writers such as Slavoj Zizek and Alexander Cockburn—will issue twenty thousand copies of the book, in paperback, to be sold at $16.95 each. (Lawrence has accepted a smaller than usual fee, of five thousand dollars.)

"I'm really not a fan of O.B.L., but I'm not happy with the reporting on him, because it's been so piecemeal and generalized," Lawrence said. He believes that the project will afford readers the opportunity to understand bin Laden in his own words. "He has to be decoded if he's going to be defeated." Besides, as Lawrence explained, "Osama may be the world's worst terrorist, but he's also one of the best prose writers in Arabic." (The historian Bernard Lewis has called bin Laden's prose "eloquent, at times even poetic.")

Among the many difficulties inherent in editing a wanted man is access: some of the texts are as elusive as bin Laden himself. "One can't go to the Library of Congress and ask for the Osama bin Laden file," Lawrence said. A speech from 2003, for instance, disappeared from the Internet a few days after a Verso employee tracked it down. Others have been heavily censored by translators or publishers. "Places where bin Laden says that people like King Fahd are apostates have been excised," Lawrence said. "And he's hell on the guy who's the interior minister!" One fatwa, known as the Ladenese Epistle, was published in English translation by a London-based newspaper, but the newspaper is refusing to make the original available to Lawrence. "I've put out an all-points bulletin to try to get an Arabic researcher to go to the British Library to see if it can be found," he said. Even the texts that are readily accessible have been corrupted by the process of serialization—the original disseminated through an outlet like Al Jazeera, then transcribed by Arabic newspapers, then translated for English-speaking media, and so on, until the intended meaning and inflection devolve into hearsay.

"The transcripts are horrendous," Lawrence said. "The Arabic is flat and sometimes just wrong." While fragmentation, misspellings, and poor grammar and punctuation muddle the existing translations, the new ones—twenty-seven, with a special appendix for fakes—will reflect bin Laden's prose as Lawrence reads it: stark, lean, free of colloquialism, resonant in multiple registers. "His language is like Chaucer's in its archaic expression," Lawrence said.

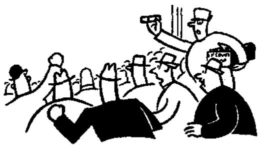
He went on, "His attraction for a certain audience is that he uses a direct style of speech, removing himself to the third-person singular"—"Osama did not kill all those people" is a typical regular-guy feint—"and has a repertoire of references to early Islam, to scripture, to anecdote, and to poetry."

Bin Laden's rhetorical arsenal also includes casuistic logic (while he claims not to approve of killing innocents, when asked about killing Americans he reasons that, since Americans pay taxes, there's no such thing as an American innocent) and metonymy ("Oh, God. It really gets complex when he uses a phrase like 'Al Jazeera,' which literally means 'peninsula,' but is taken to mean 'Saudi Arabia' "). He's fond of historical allusion. ("At one point, he says, 'First there was Richard the Lionhearted, then there was Barbarossa, and now there's Bush.' ") In another speech, he alludes to an Iranian proverb: the mad goat who roughs the ground is the one who steps on the blade. "He's saying that the Zio-American crusader alliance is the equivalent of the mad goat," Lawrence explained. He even detects a dark sense of humor in bin Laden's writings: "In one of the translations, he talks about Uncle Sam. In Arabic, Uncle Sam is 'Amm Sam'— it rhymes, you see. The Arabic word *samm* means poison, and an uncle, in Arabic, is supposed to be someone you can trust."

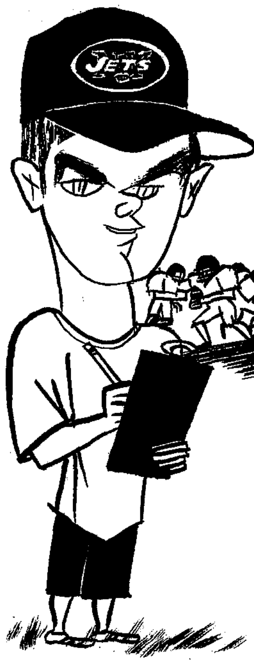
For all the richness that Lawrence finds in his subject's language, he considers bin Laden's calm, affectless delivery to be strangely at odds with his message of vengeance. "You read this stuff and you say, wait a minute—how does he manage to get people excited when he's such a monotone speaker? It's as if his anti-charisma were a form of charisma. He's almost like Ed Muskie."

—Lauren Collins

FIELD TRIP
THE PRE-SEASON KID



Each week in the fall, Andy Benoit decorates the family basement by arranging cutout cardboard logos of pro football teams on the wall; the pattern varies according to who's playing whom. On Sunday morning, he watches pre-game coverage from nine until ten—this is in Boise, on Mountain Time—then breaks for half an hour to join his parents and his sister Katy for mandatory breakfast. From ten-thirty until nine in the evening, he's back in the basement, alone, staring at the TV, which is equipped with the N.F.L. Sunday Ticket satellite package. Upstairs, another TV records selected games, so that, come spring, Benoit can study old videotapes. He watches six hours of tape each day for a month—and then he's ready to write.



Andy Benoit

Benoit, who just graduated from Boise High, is the author of "Andy Benoit's Touchdown 2005," an N.F.L. pre-season guide that was published this month by Ballantine. Though this marks his national début, it's the ninth volume in a series that Benoit began in fourth grade, with his mom serving as typist. (From Volume IV, "Touchdown 2K": "Last season was a huge turnaround for the league, and that made me look stupid. This year's book will be more precise. You can use the book for gambling if you like, just don't blame me when you lose the farm.") Benoit doesn't play football; he just watches it on TV. In fact, he's never been to an N.F.L. game.

Last week, Benoit paid a visit to the Jets' training facility, in Hempstead, Long Island. It was his first time seeing pro football in person, and also his first experience with green turf; the field at his home-town Bronco Stadium, on the Boise State campus, is Smurf blue. Benoit took a place along the sideline, watching the team run various drills, and after a minute or two a couple of men approached and asked if he was with the media.

"No, this is Andy Benoit, the author," a reporter standing nearby said, and produced a copy of the nearly two-hundred-page "Touchdown 2005" for inspection. (Page 30: "The New York Jets seem to have hopped on the subway at South Ferry in Manhattan, ridden all the way north past 103rd Street, clear up past Dyckman Street, across the Hudson River, through the western side of the Bronx, and straight on out of the city. Their destination? Mediocrity.")

"You did this yourself?" one of the men, whose name was Robert, asked. "How old are you?"

"Nineteen," Benoit said.

"Hey, Stephen, look at this," Robert said. "He wrote all this himself."

Soon the two men, who had been granted access to the field as corporate guests of the team, moved from incredulous to inquisitional.

"How's Blaylock look?" Stephen asked, referring to the team's new backup running back.

"Oh, he's real solid, he'll fit in great with the system," Benoit said.

A receiver, Justin McCareins, ran a simple fly-in route and dropped an easy pass. "What about him?" Robert asked.

"If that were third down, he would've caught that," Benoit said. (Page 32: "He has what it takes to be a very viable third-down option.")

"You ever think about becoming a scout?" Stephen asked, and then called out to another man, a few feet away, "Hey, Bobby, show him your card."

Bobby reached into his wallet and pulled out a light-blue card identifying him as an N.F.L. scout. He said that he worked for the Raiders. Then he asked for a copy of the book and for Benoit's e-mail address.

After practice, the players lumbered back to the locker room, and Benoit stopped Kevin Mawae ("the best center in football," according to page 31) in the parking lot, handing him a book.

"That's impressive, man," Mawae said. "I have a hard time just writing a three-page paper. Where are you from?"

"Boise."

"Oh, I know all about it—the land of the blue turf," Mawae said.

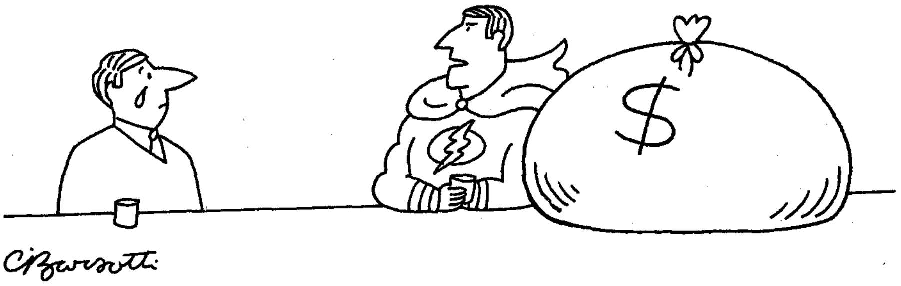
He turned to the Jets chapter, and scanned the pages for his name. " 'All-World,' I can live with that," he said, smiling. "So tell me, what are you interested in outside of football?"

Benoit said that he likes talking about politics and current events, but mainly football. Mawae stressed that it was important to have other interests—"For instance, I'm in graduate school right now, and I like to hunt and fish"—and then asked for Benoit's number so that he could pass it on to a writer friend.

Ballantine had arranged for a driver to take Benoit back to the city. On the ride home, his cell phone rang: "Katy? I don't know any Katys. Did you talk to my publicist?" He was joking; the caller was his sixteen-year-old sister, in Boise. "Yeah, I had a great time," Benoit went on. "I got to meet the best player on the team. Oh, wait, it's Dad on the other line."

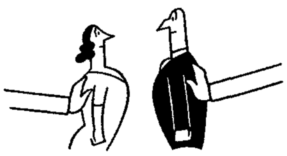
He switched over—"Dad, I'm talking to Katy"—and then back to his sister again. "Um, it's a Town Car," he said, glancing around. "Jay-Z has ridden in it. That's what the gentleman who's driving told me."

—Ben McGrath



"Oh, grow up."

THE WORLD WIDE WEB
HELLO, LONELINESS



On July 14, 2004, someone using the pseudonym Lonely logged on to www.moviecodec.com, a Web site dedicated to the technicalities of creating, uploading, downloading, and viewing digital video files. Typically, the site's message boards carry headings such as "DX 50 and DIV3 Codecs" and "How Do I Burn AVI Movies to DVD with Nero 6 Ultra Edition?" Lonely, however, decided to create a discussion forum entitled "I am so lonely will anyone speak to me." "Ok so how are you," the first respondent asked. "Are you a piece of pig's bollok?" Before long, a different breed of visitor had begun to arrive. "Dude," someone named wetfeet2000 posted a little over a week later, "I typed in 'I am lonely' in Google, and your post was the very first response. Does that make you the most popular loneliest person on the planet?"

By a serendipitous combination of the phrasing of Lonely's declaration and moviecodec.com's popularity among people who are interested in digital video, the forum had indeed jumped to the top of Google's results for the phrase "I am lonely." Visitors from around the world logged on with personal expressions of solitude, ranging from the adolescent ("Spring break really fucking sucks") and the temporary ("My wife is gone for the night") to the involved ("I'm in the final year of my Ph.D., I have no life, and I am broken up with my gf because she joined a cult"), the confused ("I typed: 'why is abc bittorrent not working' and I got 'I am lonely.' Not too hilarious"), and the existential ("I feel like a floating piece of dust in outer space"). Among the posters was moviecodec.com's proprietor, a twenty-seven-year-old Danish computer programmer named Bjarne Lundgren. "I'm the webmaster/owner of moviecodec.com and I'm also quite lonely," he wrote in November, punctuating his message with a yellow frowny face.

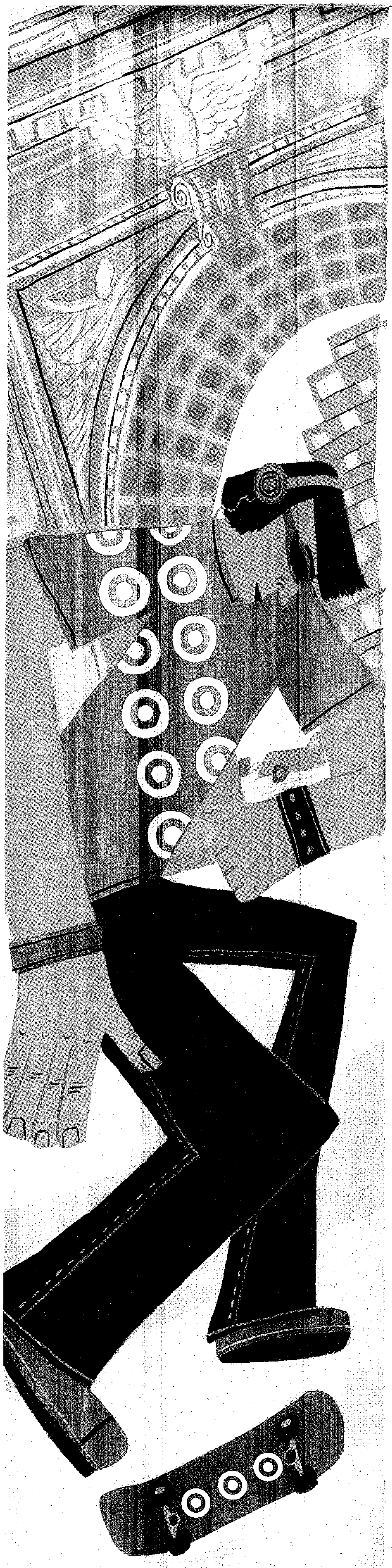
Reached recently at his home, in the city of Odense, Lundgren seemed only halfheartedly pleased about his role as the accidental confessor of online loneliness. "Moviecodec.com started out mainly because I was having problems with codecs myself," he said. And while he can relate to the messages—"I've always been a kind of lonely guy," he said—he hasn't derived any therapeutic value from them. "I don't personally get much out of it. But if other people get something out of it, that's cool."

The site's visitors have posted a hundred and seven pages of musings about loneliness. "Just when you think 'it's just me' you find other people feeling the same way," a recent arrival wrote. (A few regulars have compiled a "lonely people reading list": Salinger, Steinbeck, Susanna Tamaro's "Follow Your Heart.") Some posters have relayed desperation—"I am a US Cavalry Scout," one message read. "Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if I didn't come back from Iraq"—while others seem merely bored. "I'm just watching the clock till my lunch comes along and I can eat my tortellini," an office worker wrote. "Tortellini rocks the kazba."

Because the site's ads are also directed through Google, banners for depression-related pharmaceuticals began appearing on it, conveying an unintentional air of authority. "I have had to censor a few posts," Lundgren said. "I think there was some guy telling people to kill themselves, and telling them how." He has left up several messages threatening suicide, however. "Mostly, other people try and help them," he said.

Lundgren, for his part, has been so busy lately with his obligations as Web master that he hasn't had time to focus on loneliness. "I've got a few more friends," he said. "And a girlfriend. In fact, that's why I don't have much time."

—Evan Ratliff



THE POLITICAL SCENE

LONE STAR

Kinky Friedman on the campaign trail.

BY DAN HALPERN

Here are a few lessons from modern American music. First, he not busy being born is busy dying. Second, you can't hang a man for killing a woman who is trying to steal your horse. And, third, you come to see what you want to see; you come to see, but you never come to know.

These are good lessons. Bob Dylan provided the first, Willie Nelson the second. The third belongs to Kinky Friedman, who, in the nineteen-seventies, travelled around the country with his country-and-Western band—Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys—annoying audiences with a series of goading, satirical songs with titles like "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" and "Asshole from El Paso." In the eighties, after the band broke up, Kinky reinvented himself as a mystery novelist. In the past twenty years, he has written seventeen mysteries starring a detective named Kinky Friedman—a Jewish cowboy from Texas who has quit a singing career for a life of sleuthing and one-liners in New York City. Today, Dylan and Nelson, whose onstage thrones in the great concert hall of musical divinity were installed decades ago, seem to intend to ride their tour buses forever. Kinky, who never learned to sit still much, has grown tired of his second career—this year, at the age of sixty, he announced that his most recent mystery will be his last—and has sought out a third. He intends to be the governor of Texas.

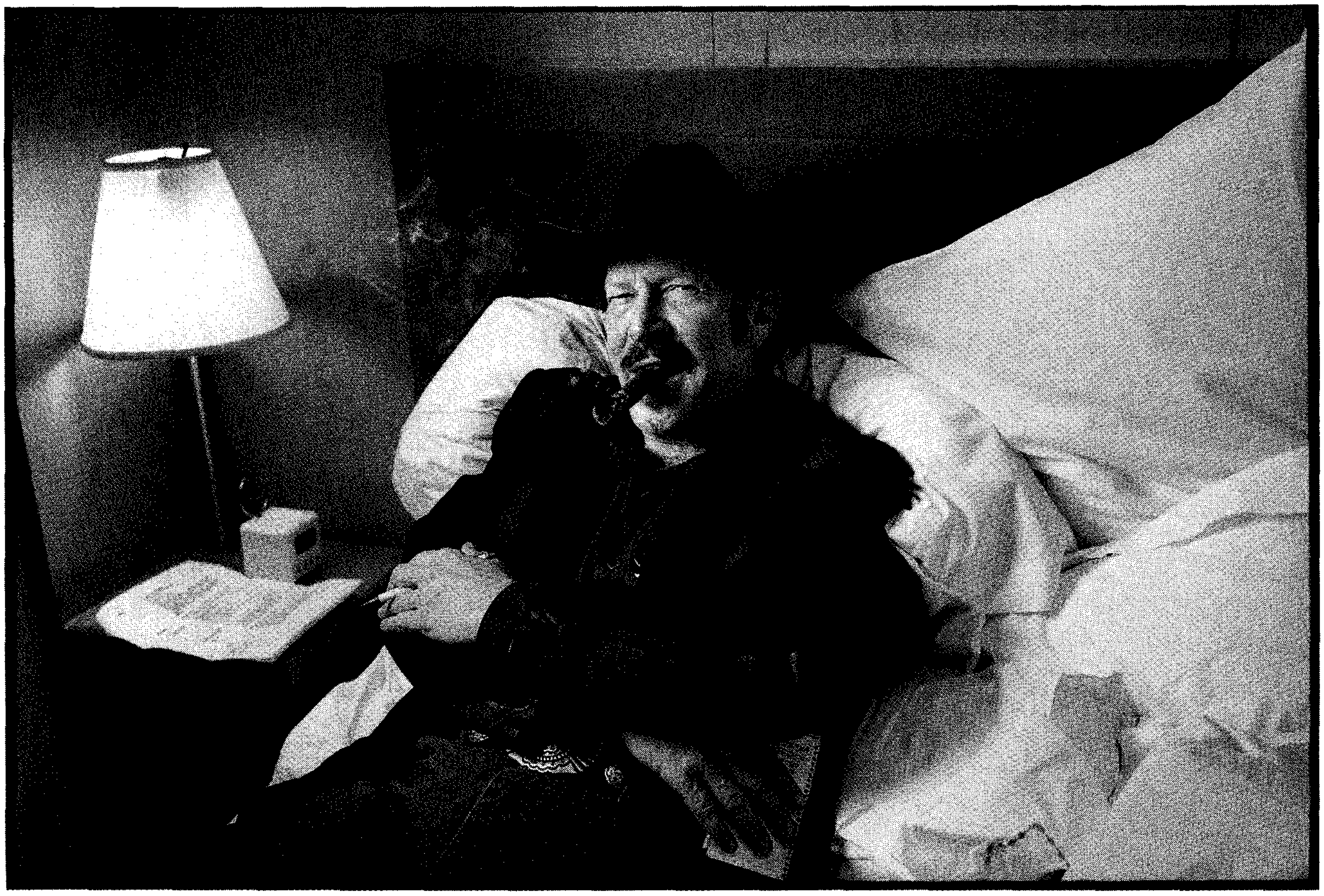
At nine o'clock on a bright May morning, near the start of his first real campaign swing, the candidate was sitting in the shabby ground-floor restaurant of the Doubletree Hotel in downtown Houston, wondering what to have for breakfast. "The decisions that kill me are the little ones," Kinky told me later. "Wardrobe kills me. I have two outfits. I have my Waylon Jennings vest, which is this booger here that Waylon gave me, and I have my preaching coat, and every morning it takes me half the goddam day to figure which one I'm going to wear." On this occasion, he had gone with the vest—the preaching coat is usually reserved for more formal occasions—a slightly weather-beaten black leather number, worn over a black shirt and jeans, topped off with his customary black Stetson and the first of eight or ten cigars (Montecristo No. 2s) that he smokes each day. "The Governor has decided on pancakes!" he barked, finally. "Jewford, are there pancakes at this buffet? Do you see any kind of pancakes anywhere?"

"Pancakes for the Governor! The Governor will have pancakes!" Little Jewford shouted, and promptly did nothing about it. Little Jewford—who was born Jeff Shelby—was one of the original Jewboys, a conservatory-trained pianist who played keyboards, accordion, clavieta, toy trumpet, and kazoo. In this new road show he acts as Kinky's driver, all-around bodyman, and voice of reason—or, often, a sort of profound unreason. They have known each other for almost fifty years, since they were children, and they play off each other in a continuous Marx Brothers-style high vaudeville—Kinky does Groucho, Jewford does both Chico and Harpo. Kinky, who has never been married, often introduces Jewford to crowds as "very possibly the next First Lady of the state of Texas"; when asked about it, Jewford tends to shrug and say things like "I need a gig."

Kinky went off to look for breakfast in another part of the restaurant. Much as he has a set of different voices—a soft, ruminative tone for conversation, a booming, exaggeratedly countrified delivery when he's playing the role of bullhorn preacher—Kinky has a few different walks. Now he put on the full cowboy strut, shoulders back and hands at hips: the cowboy hunting breakfast.

He soon found the buffet and pancakes, but no syrup. "The Governor needs syrup!" Kinky said. "Is there any syrup for the Governor?"

Eventually, a waiter turned up with the syrup. He couldn't stop grinning, and he insisted on addressing Kinky deferentially as Governor, which made the candidate a little nervous. He liked making the joke himself, but the waiter really seemed to mean it. Kinky's problem, he has said, is that he considers himself a serious soul who has never been taken seriously. But you might say that his problem is more that he's always taken seriously for the wrong things, at the wrong times. He's taken literally when he sings an entirely silly anti-women's-liberation song that's meant as satire ("Get Your Biscuits in the Oven and Your Buns in the Bed"); he's not taken seriously when he sings a sober, elegiac country song about the Holocaust ("Ride 'Em Jewboy"). At breakfast, he was just having fun with the idea of being governor—self-mockery as self-importance—and the waiter took it straight; later that day, he would be annoyed by reporters who insinuated that he was just faking a campaign for the hell of it. But in the restaurant he relaxed after a moment and smiled at the waiter, shook his hand, thanked him for the syrup, and told him he was a good Texan. Then he started in on the pancakes, pronouncing, "The Governor is happy." After another bite, he added, "Well, maybe happy is going a little far. But the Governor has syrup. So that's something."



Texans' reactions to Friedman's run for governor have been startlingly straight-faced. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

CORBIS

Kinky Friedman's candidacy is bound to be something; what that something is is still up for debate. He is surely the only candidate for governor to have written extensively about his past cocaine use, or to have flown in Led Zeppelin's private plane, or to have performed at the Grand Ole Opry. He is also currently the only candidate in the 2006 Texas gubernatorial campaign to operate outside the party system, without party money. Kinky, as everyone calls him, is running as an independent candidate. He'll need nearly fifty thousand signatures to get in the race, all of which must be collected in the two months following the party primaries, next March. (Given that thirty thousand volunteers have already signed up to help on the campaign, this looks probable.) For the time being, he intends to capitalize on voter dissatisfaction, and on whatever's left of the tradition of Texas populism. In his latest book, a collection of essays called "Texas Hold 'Em," he writes, "My platform is to remember that when they went out searching for Sam Houston to try to persuade him to be the governor—and he was the greatest governor this state has ever had—rumor has it that they found him drunk, sleeping under a bridge with the Indians."

Kinky has no stump speech; he just talks. "Seventy-one per cent of eligible voters in Texas did not vote in the last gubernatorial election," he told a crowd of six or seven hundred at a public fund-raising event later that night in a Houston design store. "And what that means to me is that Texans aren't happy with the choices they're being given." The crowd ate it up, buying Kinky posters and T-shirts ("KINKY 2006: WHY THE HELL NOT?") like fans at a rock concert desperate for proof that they had seen their idol. There were a few hundred more of them than anyone had expected—Republicans and Democrats, blond society ladies with industrial-strength hair styles and balding hippies with ponytails, heavily tattooed bikers with necks like fire hydrants, lawyers in three-thousand-dollar suits, and hipster twenty-somethings with T-shirts that said things like "Jesusland: pop. 59,459,765" (a slightly inaccurate reference to the number of votes cast for George W. Bush in 2004). The size and the seriousness of the crowd, as well as its deeply strange composition, seemed to take Kinky aback a little, and he shot Jewford a bemused grin.

Back at the Doubletree, Jewford, Kinky, and Beano Boynton, a large, fast-talking Texas Hill Country native, who is in charge of fund-raising, put together a kind of late-night strategy session in Kinky's room. Not a lot of strategy actually came up. No political observer in the state was giving Kinky Friedman any chance at all, and he was still saying things like "If I win, the first thing I'll do is demand a recount," and promising that, if elected the first Jewish governor of Texas, he would reduce the speed limit to 54.95. He had previously explained that he wanted the job because he needed the closet space, and he had already promised the job of warden of women's prisons to at least eight different guys. But, one after another, voters told him they thanked God that he had decided to do this, that they were sick of the way politics was being practiced.

"These people are deathly serious," Beano said, sprawled on a chair that was slightly too small for him. He mentioned one of the organizers of the night's event. "He's the regional director," he said, "the one who wants us to do the grand opening in Austin."

"Are we helping them or are they helping us?" Kinky asked.

"We're getting their e-mail list," Beano said.

"You know, we're going to wind up with five hundred thousand volunteers and no money," Kinky said.

"Well, if that happens," Jewford said, "we can just forget the political stuff and form a new soccer league."

But Kinky's basic campaign platforms were going over well, and he felt that he was staking out a centrist spot that party candidates couldn't. Earlier in the day, he had lectured the Society of Professional Journalists on America's divided culture ("I grieve that NASCAR people never go to the lesbians' teahouses, and the lesbians never go to NASCAR") and outlined his policies on education. "I say, No Teacher Left Behind. The teachers are getting screwed," Kinky said. "Every appointee to the education system in a Friedman administration will have an education degree and classroom time." In addition to the No Teacher Left Behind program, he has proposed financing public education through the legalization of video poker terminals in bars: Slots for Tots. The journalists seemed a little disturbed by his support for nondenominational prayer in schools: what sort of prayer would it be? Kinky didn't know, but offered an explanation for his position: "Well, I confess that I get bored with the Lord on occasion, and, when I do, my spiritual adviser, Billy Joe Shaver, who has an affinity for the divinity, has convinced me that prayer is an excellent idea."

Kinky says he is not worried about a heavily Christian state accepting a Jewish candidate. (He's a little worried by a joke he used to make about Baptists, that they don't keep them underwater long enough, but not too worried.) The issue came up the following day while he was talking to a film crew from Country Music Television, who were hoping to make a reality series about the campaign. "Anyone gives me any of that shit," he said, putting on his bullhorn-preacher voice, "I'll just say, 'I'm washed in the same blood you are, brother.'" "Can we get that on camera?" a producer asked. Kinky ignored him. "And if that doesn't work," he said, "I'll hit 'em with John 3:15."

Everyone laughed, but it turned out that nobody had any idea what the passage said. Kinky grew louder. "Does anyone know? You bunch of godless heathens? It's—it's—well, shit." He lost the preacher voice for a moment. "No, no, wait a minute, I got it." He cleared his throat. "'That whosoever believeth in Jesus should not perish but have eternal life.'"

Away from the cameras, he said to me, "Eternal life! Christ. Did I tell you what Bob Dylan said to me about dying? He said, 'When you die they let you off the hook.'"

Leaving Houston, Kinky stopped briefly in Austin, and then drove off to Echo Hill Ranch for a rest. Echo Hill is a four-hundred-acre property in the Texas Hill Country, about an hour and a half west of Austin. Kinky's parents bought Echo Hill in 1952, and founded a children's summer camp there that became an important summer community for Jewish Texans. The elder Friedmans, the children of Polish and Russian immigrants, who spent

"If you're on a budget, I have something uglier."

their lives as educators, ran it until they died; Kinky's sister, who works for the State Department, helped run the place for years, and now his brother, a psychologist, has taken over.

The Friedmans moved to Texas from Chicago in 1945, a year after Kinky's birth. (Of Chicago, Kinky, who was born Richard Friedman, has written, "I lived there one year, couldn't find work, and moved to Texas, where I haven't worked since.") Echo Hill is the site of many of Kinky's happiest memories, and when he's not on the road he spends most of his time there, in a small, slightly dilapidated one-story lodge, decorated with old Jewboy posters and countless photographs of his family and friends. He putters around, refills the hummingbird feeders that his mother put out decades ago, takes phone calls. He makes occasional trips into town, but not often. He lives alone, except for four profoundly unruly dogs whom he calls the Friedmans and on whom he dotes as if they were grandchildren. Over a meal of steak and beans—in fact every meal we ate at the ranch was steak and beans—the dogs are likely to end up with most of the steak while Kinky gets the beans.

Kinky spent his summers at Echo Hill—as boys, he and Jewford first performed together there—as a camper and then as a counsellor, through high school in Austin and college at the University of Texas. It was at U.T. that Richard Friedman became Kinky Friedman, a name given him by Nick (Chinga) Chavin, later a country singer himself, in reference to Kinky's hair—"a little Jewish Afro," as Chavin put it. (Kinky has referred to his hair as "a Lyle Lovett starter kit.") Kinky graduated in 1966, joined the Peace Corps, and was posted to Borneo. "I taught the children to play Frisbee, and some Hank Williams songs," he told me, sitting in a small field at the ranch. He has often noted that he was sent to teach agriculture to people who had been farming successfully for thousands of years. So he spent most of his time playing with the children, getting drunk with the adults, and writing some of the songs that he later became known for. "We learned a lot more than they did," he said. "It changed us." He paused, considered the half-smoked, extinguished cigar in his hand, and lit it up again. "And the truth is if those people had come to Texas at that time somebody probably would have stomped the shit out of them."

He left Borneo in 1968 and ended up in Nashville, trying to make it as a songwriter. Eventually, he called Jewford, who was in California, studying music and theatre, and started getting a band together. The Jewboys were in place by 1973, when they released their first LP, "Sold American." That summer, they performed at the Grand Ole Opry, in Nashville, and the title track of "Sold American" reached the country charts. Soon, the Jewboys were performing with Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, with Jerry Lee Lewis and Billy Joel. Everyone from Jerry Garcia and Ken Kesey to Abbie Hoffman and Keith Richards showed up to see them, and Kinky toured with Dylan on his "Rolling Thunder Revue."

No one quite knew what to make of them. Dylan Ferrero, a Peace Corps friend who became the Jewboys' road manager, told me, "Major Bowles, our drummer, used to say, 'What's wrong, man—we don't have any groupies! All we got is Jewish sociology professors taking notes!'" The concept of political correctness was just taking shape, and the Jewboys' entire plan of attack was to puncture it. There were serious songs—"Rapid City, South Dakota," for instance, which Kinky has described as "the first pro-choice country song"—but the satirical work got most of the attention. "Sure, we wanted to shock the world, to a certain degree," Jewford said. "And what we were doing, well, Hank Williams and Bob Wills, absolutely, but also Lenny Bruce." The Jewboys got thrown off the stage in Dallas, chased off the stage in Buffalo, and threatened, by both Jewish groups and anti-Semites, in New York.

"The truth is, I don't remember all that much of it," Kinky told me. He once wrote, "I'd had a number of bad experiences with drugs, one of them lasting for several decades." Jewford told me, "There was a doctor in Nashville everyone called Dr. Snap. You'd just go to Dr. Snap, and you'd say, 'Oh, I'm tired, really tired, Dr. Snap.' Of course, there'd also be nine hundred musicians in a line right behind you." At one point, Jewford said, he was doing so much speed that the ends of his handlebar

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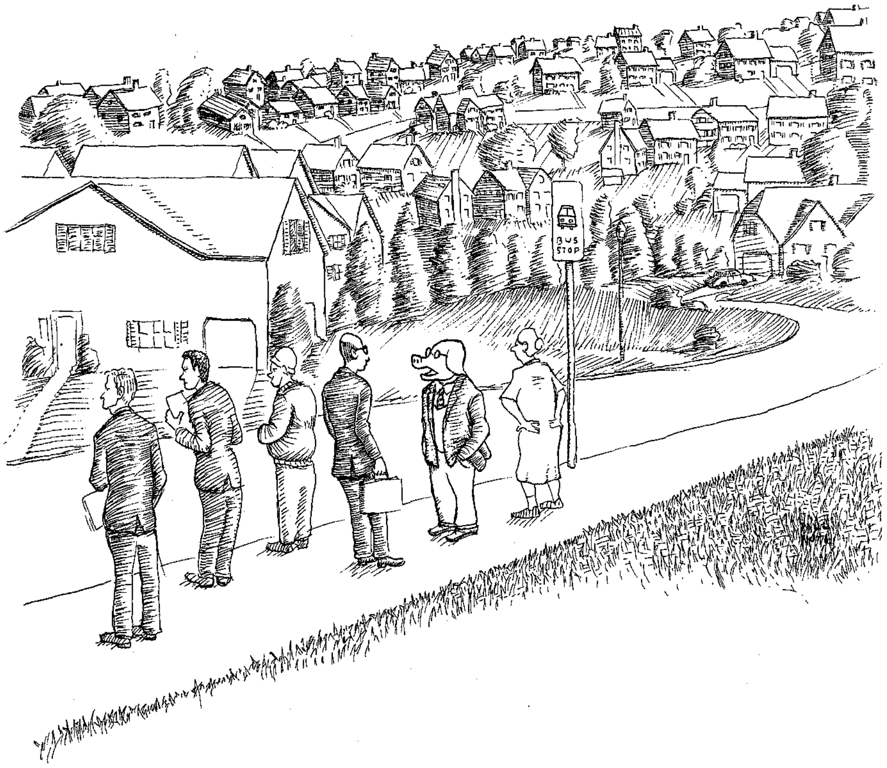


"I can remember when this was all farmland."

• •

mustache just fell off. And then there was cocaine. "All of a sudden, it was there. It just appeared. And it appeared in mounds. And then shovelfuls."

The Jewboys didn't so much break up as drift apart. The way Ferrero remembers it, he was standing in line at an airport after a gig in 1976 and spotted Jewford standing in another line, waiting for a different flight. Jewford said nothing, got on the plane, and never came back. He and Kinky didn't reunite until twenty years later, when they began playing tours in Europe and Australia. Kinky ended up performing with new backup bands in a weekly slot at the Lone Star Café, in New York. It was a successful show, with a celebrity following that included John Belushi and Mickey Mantle, but cocaine was exacting a toll, spiritually and financially. "Kinky was taking in something like six thousand dollars a week, and he still couldn't afford a place to live," Mike McGovern, a former columnist for the *News*, told me.

Kinky's first forays into mystery writing, he likes to say, came out of a dead horse: his record label had dropped him, and the Lone Star show was flagging. "I was at a real low point," he told me at Echo Hill. "Desperation drove those early books." He wrote the first, "Greenwich Killing Time," in 1984, on a typewriter that had belonged to McGovern's mother; McGovern himself features as the police's main suspect in a Greenwich Village murder. But Kinky was tired of New York. He had recently lost his "spiritual big brother," the actor Tom Baker, to heroin, and a girlfriend, Kacey Cohen—"the love of my life, as they say"—in a car crash. In 1985, he went home to Texas; that year, his mother died of a heart attack. After that, he stayed home, leaving drugs and, for the most part, the wild life behind him. It's not lost on him that, in effect, he simply moved back in with his parents and never left. "I'm still a child, very immature," he told me. "Never really grew up, never really did a conventional job." Children pick up on this and see a kind of ally in Kinky, immediately fixing on him as the most interesting person in the room. "Treat adults like children and children like adults" was one of his father's guiding credos, and it is perhaps in an only slightly twisted homage to this that one of Kinky's favorite lines, when he spots a child in the audience, is "The Kinkster never likes to say 'fuck' in front of a c-h-i-l-d."

Kinky moved into a little green trailer at Echo Hill and set about writing novels, which began to appear at the rate of nearly one a year. Populated by people from Kinky's life, the books are based in reality but jump off from there into loopy mystery plots. The plots are always subordinate to the voice, that of a somewhat addled cowboy-philosopher-king: "It's OK to think you're a cowboy, unless, of course, you happen to run into someone who thinks he's an Indian." These riffs are offset by the doings of a host of additional troublemakers, who run around New York bickering and ignoring Kinky's wit and eating Chinese food, while Kinky ends up having conversations with his cat. Eventually, a crime is solved.

"My primary aim is to amuse Americans on their aircraft," Kinky once said, but, as with the music, his ambitions have always been, subtly, a little higher. Bill Clinton, a fan of the novels—he has asked Kinky for a cameo role in one—has said, "Some of them are actually quite good as mystery novels, but they're all good in terms of the development of his take on life." In this sense, the books are, like the music, a vehicle for the essential, unchanging product: Kinky himself. Lyle Lovett, who cites Kinky's music as an influence on his own career, has said, "His career with the Texas Jewboys was just a way to introduce Kinky to the rest of us."

There are those who maintain that there's a Richard Friedman behind the curtain, pulling the strings of a Kinky character, both in the books and in life. But the majority of his friends feel that Kinky is Kinky onstage and off. As his friend Penn Jillette, of the duo Penn & Teller, put it, "If you keep scratching Kinky, peeling off layers, you've got more of an onion thing going on than a mask." As we drove back to Austin from Echo Hill, I asked whether the character is an idealized version of himself. "Well, he's not an alter ego," he said. "I mean, he's not a guy who does great things. All he does is, he stumbles around, he can't get laid, and he fucks up." Then he added, "You have your life and your work, and you should get the two as confused and as mixed up as possible. Make it all one fabric. Vincent van Gogh did that. Hank Williams did it, Allen Ginsberg, Bukowski, those kinds of people did it." He thought about it for a moment, lit his cigar, and added, "Anne Frank, of necessity, did it."

Kinky, in his life and work, has always felt most comfortable as an outsider: a Jew in Texas, a Texan in New York, a reactionary in progressive circles, and a progressive in conservative circles. "Too smart for country, too country for the intelligentsia," as the journalist Larry Sloman—better known as Ratso, who in the mysteries plays Watson to Kinky's Sherlock—once put it. In front of a liberal crowd, Kinky throws in as many racist and sexist epithets as he can think of. If it's a country crowd, he uses bigger words and makes fun of rednecks. Naturally, this is part of his political appeal: politicians are always careful to say nothing offensive, whereas Kinky is careful to always say something offensive; he provokes not to stop conversation but to start it. It's a delicate balance, however. As Evan Smith, the editor of *Texas Monthly*, for which Kinky wrote a column for four years, put it, "If he's too much like the Kinky we all know and love, he risks not being taken seriously—but if he's too serious he risks just being another guy. People will say, 'If I wanted an unfunny guy, I'd vote for one of the actual candidates.'"

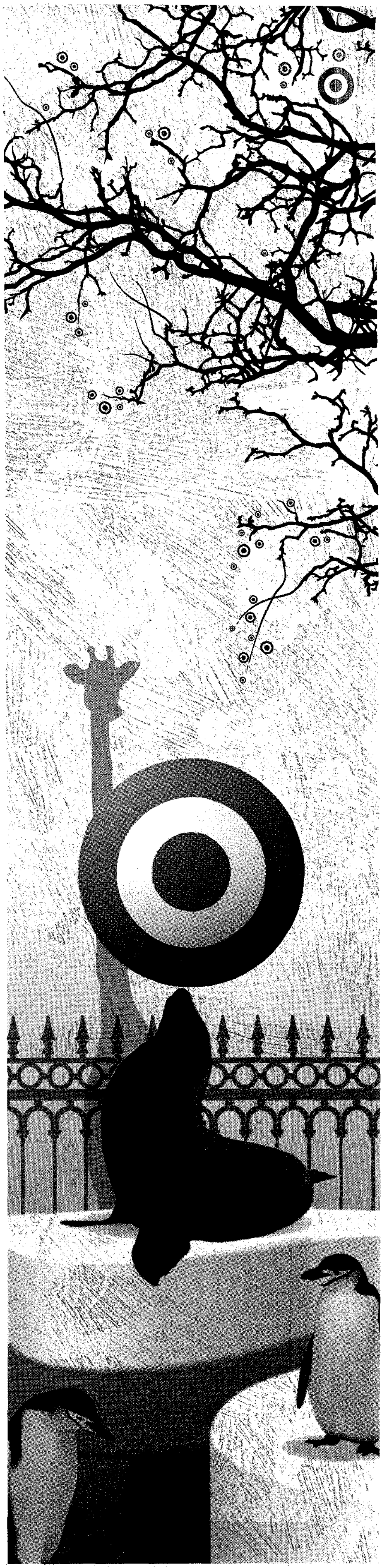
Kinky will have to convince voters that he's at least a little serious, and this means convincing them that he is sincere. Willie Nelson, aboard his tour bus just before a show in New Jersey, told me, "They come to hear just how far out is this guy, and I think that's true of any entertainer who is being honest and truthful." Kinky has said that he would appoint Nelson as his energy czar, in order to explore expanding the use of biodiesel, an alternative fuel that Nelson uses in his buses and cars. "They want to know how honest you're gonna be," Nelson said, "and I haven't seen him back off on anything."

Returning to Austin, Kinky introduced a new media consultant to the press—Bill Hillsman, an adman who worked on Jesse Ventura's campaign for governor of Minnesota, in 1998. The Ventura campaign, with its tiny budget, outlandish candidate, and unexpected triumph, is an important model for the Kinky campaign—Dean Barkley, the campaign director, also worked for Ventura—and Hillsman lost no time in schooling the staff on how to attract what he calls "unlikely voters." At a strategy summit outside Austin, some of the campaign staff began to complain that the candidate's policy positions weren't being publicized enough. Hillsman, a pale Chicagoan rapidly turning pink in the strong Texas sun, told them, "We're in the business of fomenting discontent. Even if we've got the greatest answers in the world, now's the wrong time to be putting them out there, because no one's really listening." Most of the staff—a combination of Kinky's old friends and energetic twenty-somethings—seemed to agree, although Cleve Hattersley, a musician who managed Kinky's solo career in the eighties and is now the campaign's communications director, said later, "I agree with Dean and Bill that less is best, but we do need more about who the fuck he is."

The campaign was now several weeks old, and the lines about needing more closet space were beginning to disappear. Kinky found himself approached more and more by Texans desperate for an alternative to the sort of candidates they were used to, and he was starting to feel that he had a responsibility to these people. More and more, he was saying, "You know, there's something happening here," and "I'm starting to think we could actually win this goddam thing."

The CNN political analyst and former Clinton adviser Paul Begala, who is from Houston, said, "It's still, obviously, a Hail Mary, but the conditions are there." He pointed to the likelihood of a weak Democratic candidate and of a vicious and divisive G.O.P. primary. "Kinky desperately needs a scandal," he said, but, he added, that's hardly out of the realm of possibility, with grand-jury investigations of a number of prominent Texas Republicans. "I think the stakes are lower in Texas, and Texans understand that," he said, referring to the fact that the governor's power in Texas is, compared with other states, limited. "We're unlikely to go to war with Oklahoma."

The next leg of the campaign was a tour through the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Between fund-raisers, Kinky was



dragged from his hotel across the street to the Bullring, a cavernous, mostly empty beer joint. Its owner, Ace Cook, a squat man with a yellowing walrus mustache, wanted to inform Kinky of his political philosophy.

"I'm for you," Cook said, sitting down to write the campaign a check. "I'm sick of these assholes who don't represent me, or represent people." By now, this sentiment had become a common refrain. "They represent A.T. & T. and Enron. How you gonna come and beg for my vote and then have nothing to do with me? Did Enron elect you or did I? I'm paying your salary, hoss. How'd it be if someone went up to the capitol and did what they said they would?"

"It'd be a first," the candidate said.

"I believe it, hoss," Cook said. "That's why you're gonna win."

Later that afternoon, a fund-raiser open to the public at the Flying Saucer, another Fort Worth bar, turned out to be precisely the sort of thing that professional political operatives plan—a venue filled with at least three times the number of people it's supposed to accommodate. It was very hot and very humid, and Kinky's voice was suffering. His writing hand was starting to cramp as he signed T-shirt after T-shirt, poster after poster, and the playful gleam in his eye was beginning to glaze over. Two firemen asked what he thought about cities dipping into firefighters' pension funds. "That's bullshit," Kinky said, and more or less left it at that. But Kinky's answer, and his style, was enough for the firemen, who called themselves Johnny Bravo and Blue. "He's my man," said Bravo, who voted for Rick Perry, the incumbent governor, in the last election. "I'm going to vote for him," said Blue, who had voted Democrat. "I'm willing to vote for him just to send a message. But if he could actually win, so much the better."

Afterward, Kinky was escorted to a gigantic white S.U.V. and driven to the next event, at a bar in Dallas. "Suicide," he muttered. "Suicide. Jesus, this could be a prison. What about all those security guys, talking into their sleeves? How's that going to work? 'Roger, roger, ten-four: Dirtbag 1 is moving. Repeat, Dirtbag 1 is moving.'"

"Don't flatter yourself," Jewford said. "More like Dirtbag 5. Plenty of dirtbags more important than you."

But Kinky was not to be cheered up. He was worried that he wouldn't be able to deal with people at the bar in Dallas. It was a bigger place, and some of the crowd were there just to drink. But here, too, the line went out the door for hours. These voters had had more alcohol than the afternoon crowd; a woman asked Kinky to sign her breast. ("Rick Perry would never do this," she said, inspecting the autograph afterward. "Who'd want him to?" her friend said.) One slightly drunk voter asked Jewford why he wanted to be governor. "I don't," Jewford said. Several more asked him the same thing. "I don't want to be fucking governor," he said. "What's your stance on the environment?" a man asked, unfazed. "I don't have a fucking stance," Jewford said. Kinky, signing a poster with his face on it, heard the exchange and cracked up. But afterward he collapsed into the car.

The next morning, Jewford drove Kinky to Houston. Kinky was still irritated about a few people at the fund-raiser who had asked him if this was all just a ploy to sell books, and he was tired of being followed around by the crew from Country Music Television. "Do I really want to be one of these old-time, colorful political fucks?" he said. "Do I really want to be this all the time? The Governor is sick of being miked. The Governor is sick of these fucks watching him all the time." He opened the window to light up a dead Montecristo, changed his mind, and rolled the window back up. "On the other hand, I do like the idea of being able to say, 'The Governor needs a cigar! The Governor needs a drink!'"

He played with the cigar for a few minutes. "W.W.W.R.D.—What Would Will Rogers Do? That's really it. Does that work? What did that lady call me? A modern-day common-sense philosopher? I think that's it. I think that's what we need."

"Yes, Ma'am," Jewford said.

"It's a corrupt and diseased system. It's the stifling of Texas's spirit, and it's the career politicians who are the real joke. Oh, hell. This could be something—but who fucking knows? We have no idea how this is going to turn out."

"You don't know what the monkey eat until the monkey shit," Jewford said, quoting a line from one of Kinky's favorite sages, Leon (Slim) Dodson, a Second World War veteran who worked for years at Echo Hill washing dishes.

"That's right," Kinky said, very pleased. Thinking of Slim made him happy for a moment. But, despite the success of the evening, he was annoyed, and not looking forward to a private fund-raiser with a wealthier crowd.

"I'm sick of being a performing monkey," he said after a while. "I'm sick of these rich motherfuckers. But I'm also sick of people asking me if this is a joke. God damn it, I *am* serious. And they're going to see that I am, eventually." He paused, then added, "People are always misunderstanding each other. You can never think you have the last word on any human heart."

You come to see what you want to see, but you never come to know. Although Kinky wrote that line more than three decades ago, he's never got entirely used to the idea that he was going to be seen a lot but never quite known the way he wanted. Intellectually, he accepts it. "Well, I like to be as misunderstood as the next guy," he once said, "so I like guys like van Gogh, and Oscar Wilde, and Jesus Christ, and Lenny Bruce—yeah, I relate to them." But he was still stewing about it when we made a rest stop in West, a small town near Waco, where he was approached by a middle-aged man from Dallas named Dennis Rainwater. It took just a few minutes for Kinky to know Dennis Rainwater a little and to like him very much; in just a few minutes, Dennis Rainwater came to feel that he knew and liked Kinky. They talked about Rainwater's family history, and his home town, Harlingen, down in the Rio Grande Valley, not far from the Gulf of Mexico and the border. They talked briefly about how vicious and empty politics had become, and whether Kinky could change it. Rainwater thought so.

"So you're half Irish, half Cherokee? Now, that, my friend, is a powerful combination," Kinky said, and made a joke about the potential for whiskey consumption.

Rainwater didn't seem to mind. "I'll see you on that ballot," he said.

On parting, Kinky gave him his standard benediction: "May the god of your choice bless you." ♦

← Exit
Entry
Entry

SHOUTS & MURMURS

THE NEW ARMY RECRUITING PAMPHLET

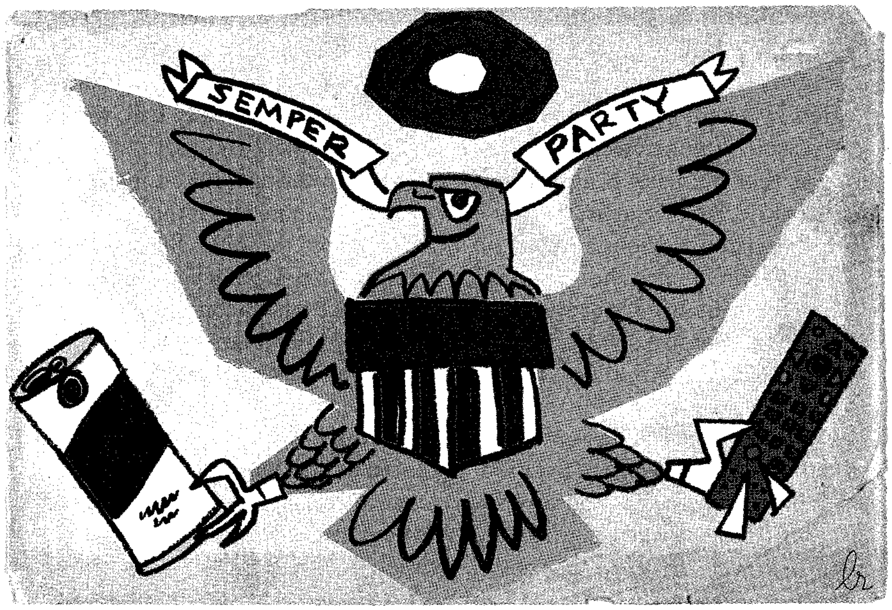
BY JOEL STEIN

> "Sign up and you're signing away your free time!" That's just one of the many myths out there about Today's Military. The reality? 30 days of paid vacation a year is the norm. From salaries to Basic Training, there are lots of misconceptions about military life. Maybe it's time to familiarize yourself with the truth.
>
> *—From Today's Military, a government Web site.*

Dude, we totally know what you're thinking. That you'll have to wake up early. That we'll make you run all day with heavy stuff on your back. That you have to be drug-free, know how to read, and rank the U.S. as one of your top five favorite countries. Wrong, wrong, and wrong! And whatever else you're thinking? Wrong!

The Army is actually a whole lot of fun. Picture this: You get up—ten, eleven, whatever's good for you. Then we have brunch. Pancakes, waffles, French toast, some grease if the night before was a rough one. Sugar cereals. Then, at 1200 hours—just kidding! nobody here uses that number thing anymore—around noonish we hit the Xbox for a few hours of Halo and all-you-can-eat Cool Ranch Doritos. It's combat training without breaking a sweat. After a quick nap, we pack in some more training by watching a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie marathon. Then a dinner of chipped beef on toast, dehydrated mashed pota— Again, *totally joking!* We're having Taco Bell every night, all night, washed down by some of the best that Milwaukee has to offer.

As for uniforms, could that G.I. Joe crap have been any dorkier? Our new fatigues are super-comfy zebra-print pajama pants and a T-shirt from Nazareth's Hair of the Dog tour. How freaking intimidating is that going to be to other countries?



LAURIE ROSENWALD

A lot of you may have seen movies or heard stories about mean drill sergeants. No more. Not only do the new Suggestion Sergeants use phrases like "Do you mind counting off?" and "Drop and give me twenty whenever you get a minute" but they actually encourage you to yell at *them.* That's right, you—who we're guessing have never even been able to tell an A.T.M. machine what to do—will now be telling a decorated seventy-five-year-old Korean War vet that you'll unscrew his head and shit down his neck. How sweet is that?

You may have also read—*read! psych!*—you may have heard some Morning Zoo d.j.s say something about base closings. That's because we're consolidating into one huge training base that we're calling Fort Vegas. And what happens in Fort Vegas goes straight up on http://www.army.mil/fortvegas/poolsidecam for all your civilian friends to drool over. Who's bragging about their precious high-school diplomas now?

We've also realized that the title "Private" is demeaning. It makes you sound shy and socially awkward and unable to function in society. That's not you, no matter what your guidance counsellor told you. Now, while we can't hand out "General" or "Supreme Allied Commander" right away, we can offer you a whole bunch of options. Through a special arrangement with Lucas Film, you can enter the armed forces as, for example, Sith Lord Wojoski or Jar Jar Sanderson. We even have an exciting design-your-own-rank program. One of our best new recruits is Neutral Evil Half-Elf Druid McCallister. And you know what? If McCallister believes his "Little Mermaid" poncho is a cloak of invisibility, we believe it makes him invisible, too. That's where we're at right now.

When you look at female soldiers, we know what you're worried about: the "L" word. Lynndie, as in England. We assure you, our female recruits don't look like that. In fact, there's this one who looks like a cross between Pam Anderson and Gisele Bündchen, only with bigger breasts. Picture that with a cigarette in her mouth, holding a leash! I don't think the international community would be complaining. Plus, we hear she just broke up with her boyfriend. Now she's just looking for someone who is down to earth and isn't a jerk and will watch sports with her. We can introduce you.

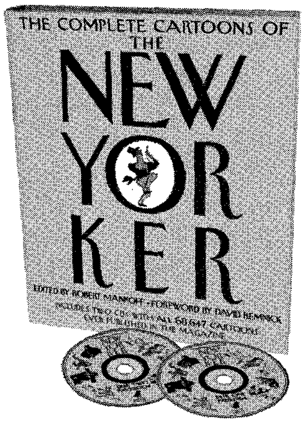
Some of you might still be thinking that though the Army sounds neat, you're not so keen on getting killed overseas in some country you couldn't find on a map, if for some reason you accidentally clicked on a map. No worries. We've been fighting for three years now, and—get this—we've racked up so many points that we've got tons of bonus lives. You could actually die in two or three suicide bombings and be totally fine. ♦

Advertisement

THE COMPLETE CARTOONS OF THE NEW YORKER

Edited by Robert Mankoff

Foreword by David Remnick



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PARIS JOURNAL

THE REAL THING

Is Paris finally having its crisis?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

The Samaritaine department store sits, vast and proud and ten stories high, on the right edge of the Seine; its terrace commands the best view of Paris around, its roof flies two pennants, its prow-shaped front seems more docked than settled on the riverbank. It's one of the great turn-of-the-nineteenth-century department stores, of the sort that inspired Zola to write "The Ladies' Paradise," at a time when Paris department stores were supreme in Europe for range and luxury, temples of goods and depots of capitalism; the name derives from a medieval water pump on the site associated with the Samaritan woman at the well in the Gospel parable. "You can find everything at Samaritaine" was the store's motto for decades, and it was, give or take a baseball mitt, true.

Then, on June 15th of this year, Paris awoke to find the store closed, apparently for good, and for no very clear reason. The ostensible explanation was that the Paris health department had declared it a firetrap. (The employees had had about a week's notice.) As a consequence, the store would have to be shut for renovation that might last four or five or even six years. But after all this time and all of a sudden? Rumors ran to fill the space left by fact; there were those who insisted that they had seen a secret model of a transformed store, which would, after the employees were let go, become a hotel—or perhaps a bank, or a corporate headquarters, or even, in the New York manner, condos with river views for the rich. The odd thing was that, far from being orphaned by some failed family firm, the store was owned by L.V.M.H., one of the great French conglomerates, whose success in the global marketplace contradicts the myth of France as a society *bloquée*. L.V.M.H. insists that it intends to reopen the Samaritaine as a department store, but it understands, perhaps, that only an imposed or invented crisis can clear the way (and, the employees fear, get rid of the employees' union) for whatever it is, exactly, that it wants to do. In order to renovate the store, you have to close it and pretend that it will never open again.

The mysteriously shuttered department store remains not so much a symbol of the French crisis as an example of the thing itself: a beautiful and legendary success of modernity, trembling at the approach of the postmodern, with plenty of money behind it but no clear path forward, caught in a miasma of regulation, rumor, and discontented workers. In fact, with the serendipity beloved of nineteenth-century novelists and metaphor-mongering foreign correspondents, the back of the closed and confused Samaritaine is only a few blocks from the courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville, the city hall, where, on the morning of July 6th, all of Paris was focussed, waiting for the announcement from Singapore about the choice of the city to host the 2012 Summer Olympics. To a degree that was almost touching in its excess, people in Paris seemed convinced that France had a lock on the games, and, even stranger, they actually seemed to *care*—as though the fate of the most beautiful of cities were balanced on the question of whether or not a group of international bureaucrats would give it permission to host a two-week track meet seven years from now. A giant neon banner had been strung across the front of the Assemblée Nationale proclaiming "Paris: 2012," and was obviously meant to hang there triumphantly through the Bastille Day celebrations, a few days later.

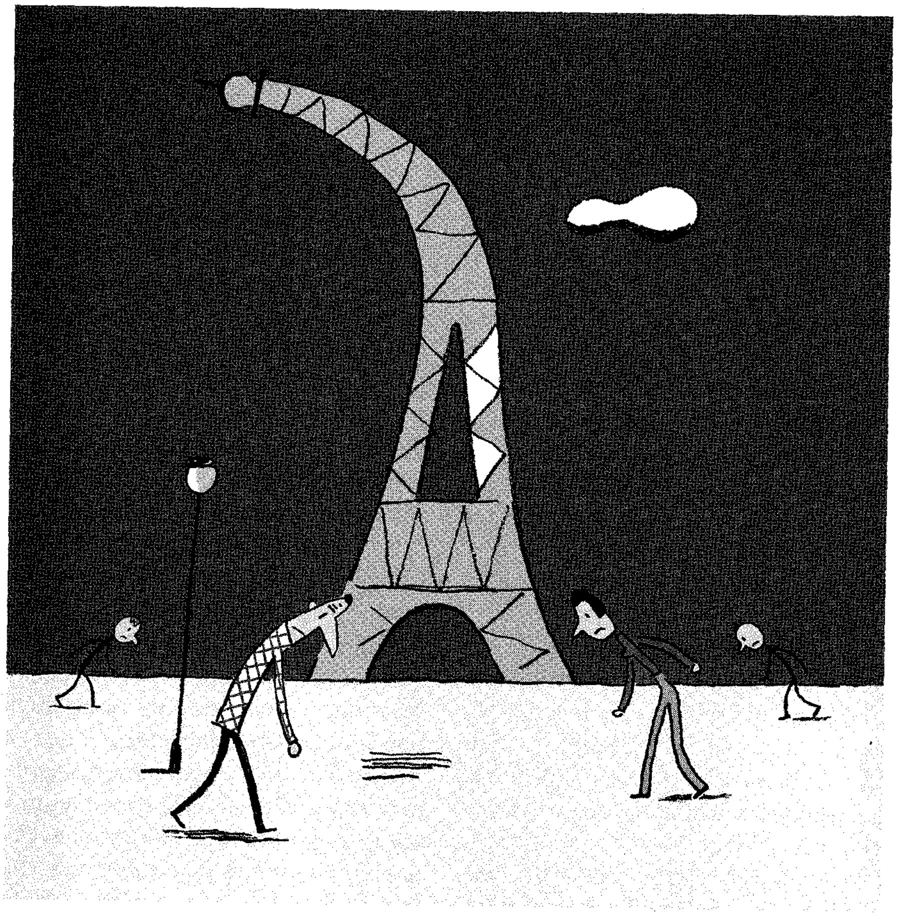
The certainty was only slightly disturbed by the French promotional clip that played over and over again on television that morning, in alternation with the British promotional clip. The

French clip was a lovely but nostalgic thing showing the Eiffel Tower with the Olympic rings exploding above it in fireworks, and images of the last Paris Olympics, in 1924, while the British clip was sharp and savvy and forward-looking, showing a multicultural London brought suddenly alive by athletics. Yet when the name "London" was announced, a punch-in-the-stomach silence struck Paris. The French Olympians insisted that the British had somehow cheated, or failed to show "fair play"—an idiom borrowed from English and used regularly in French. Almost unbelievably, Bernard Delanoë, the green-gay mayor of Paris, was still making the accusations of English trickery and cheating four days after the truly horrible news from London arrived—a failure of decency and common sense that had the left-wing newspaper *Libération*, a natural ally, lecturing him on the meaning of "sore loser" and reminding its readers that no instance of British Olympic treachery had even vaguely been discovered.

Other observers thought that, though the rejection was certainly a sign that an instant intoxication with Paris was no longer a donnée of the world's emotions, the failure had been essentially political, a manageable failure of strategy and planning. "It's true that no one wants to play with France anymore, or at least not right now, but the exasperating thing was that France didn't even try," the novelist and journalist Philippe Labro said a few days later. "It sent four politicians in gray suits to give speeches, and then President Chirac went and glad-handed a few Third Worlders, as though he were campaigning in the Corrèze, while the French athletes were all pushed to one side. And what did the British do? They sent Sebastian Coe, an effective man and a great Olympian, even if he came from the opposition party, and they put their athletes front and center, and then Blair went in with a list of undecideds and lobbied them, as a politician should. It was a case of our vanity losing to their preparation, and then we were surprised?"

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

For the first time in years, the French crisis—which for two decades has been as much a part of the French weather as the British crisis was of the British weather in the sixties and seventies—seems to be moving toward a climax, not turned a page or even entered a new chapter so much as become the subject of a new, black-bordered volume: "The Thing Is Upon Us at Last." "We are in a pre-revolutionary situation," intelligent people will say, and then talk forebodingly of the *rentrée chaude*, the hot reëntry that September promises to bring, when everyone comes back from holidays, with the union members in a belligerent mood. When the visitor searches their eyes for the usual signs of French self-dramatization, and the kind of pessimism that is happy with itself because it is so much less fatuous than Anglo-Saxon optimism, he sees only sobriety, depression, and anxiety. The language has even reached the upper levels of the government. The wildly ambitious, populist Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, who is more or less openly running for President, announced recently, "I'm not going to quietly mend locks at Versailles while a revolt is brewing in France." Louis XVI, as every French schoolgirl knows, was mending locks in Versailles when the first Revolution was on its way.



In place of the usual French self-dramatization, visitors see only sobriety and depression.

The immediate causes of the anxiety are clear enough, and so are the medium causes. On May 29th, French voters rejected the draft of a new European Union constitution that had been overseen by their own ex-President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. This was not just a defeat for the European project but a sign of a seemingly fatal disconnect between the voters and the political class—the kind of complete collapse of confidence that seems to define a "crisis of the regime." The European idea had been at the heart of both right- and left-wing policy for almost fifty years and, by every rational accounting, has always benefitted France more than any other country, from the huge subsidies that pour in every year to French farmers and winemakers to the directing role it has given France in controlling German expansionism and energy—creating a Europe with what has been called a

"French jockey on a German horse." The biggest of all European projects, the creation and adoption of the single currency, the euro, has been a startling success; the franc, with all its symbolism and history, disappeared in a couple of months, and no one mourned it, or even noted its passing.

In the beginning, only a handful of extreme right- and left-wing politicians opposed the constitution: the extreme left because it threatened the French social model, the extreme right because it threatened the French nation. Then the opposition began to build, some of it irrational and racist—based on a fear of East European workers taking the jobs of French ones, and of Turks overwhelming Europeans in the E.U.—but most of it merely rejectionist. "You vote not on the question but on the people who put the question," Labro says, and the French electorate saw a chance to give them all the finger, and all at once. (The very fact that voting "no" cost nothing real, while voting "yes" gained nothing tangible, made a "no" vote easy.)

Oddly, the referendum crisis did not produce a proper political crisis. When the Fifth Republic was invented, by de Gaulle, in 1958, it was meant to cure the French habit of mad political maneuvering by installing a nearly absolute monarch in the Presidency, who would, however, be subject to the popular will. In 1969, de Gaulle lost a referendum on a relatively minor point of government organization, and, as ex-President Giscard pointed out, losing on a Sunday he left the Presidential office on a Monday. Giscard's point was that any rejection of the Presidential imperative ought to be taken as a signal for a new government—and that such a rule was intended not so much to make the Presidency responsive as to make the people take care before they rejected him. "A call for Chirac to take up his responsibility and resign should have been on the front page of every newspaper," the economist Nicolas Baverez says, with wonder. But few wanted to propose it—Chirac for all the obvious reasons, reinforced by some more idiosyncratic ones (he has been under investigation for corruption during the years when he was mayor of Paris, and might even be indicted if he left office), and the rest of the élite, political and media alike, because of a genuine fear that, in a tempest of electoral politics, the winner might well be on the extreme left or right.

That the vote on the referendum delighted both neo-imperialist American neocons and radical-left anti-imperialist *alter-mondialistes* was, for a lot of smart people, a sign of its true nature: it represented a red-brown coalition of fearfulness, anti-cosmopolitanism, and atavism. The philosopher Pascal Bruckner, one of the few French center-left intellectuals who actually supported the war in Iraq, sees the result as a kind of nightmarish evening on which all France's demons came home and took over the living room.

"France is the victim of her two demons," he explains, "the left neo-Bolshevism that derives from the egalitarianism of the Revolution and still dreams of a great night of anti-capitalist massacre, and the right-wing xenophobic nationalism that was nourished by a long modern tradition running from Boulanger"—the French reactionary general who nearly took power in the late nineteenth century—"to Le Pen. These two currents fused perfectly in this campaign, each returning to its ancient tasks and tactics, but happily sharing the same enemies: the Polish plumber, the immigrants from the east, and, above all, 'Anglo-Saxon liberalism' and 'ultra-liberalism.'"

Over coffee on a hot July night, Bruckner, who, as a social democrat, believes in ever-larger shares in an ever-expanding pie, seems nearly in despair. "This depression that we've been talking about for twenty years is real now," he says. "Fear, absolute fear of change, is the dominant emotion of the country. People talk of a revolution, or say that this will end in the streets—but what does that really mean? Where is the revolutionary class? The kids in the suburbs? O.K., they could turn—but that would be a riot, not a revolution. The only revolutionary forces in sight are the ancient demons. I can genuinely imagine the next Presidential round ending with Le Pen and Pierre Lambert," the leader of the extreme left Trotskyite party. One presses him to modify his words, and he insists that he isn't joking or exaggerating about the scale of political bankruptcy.

Left or right, there is no one who does not feel that the Chirac Presidency has been, at best, a dull decade of missed chances and, at worst, a catastrophe for France, a series of progressively more cynical opportunisms that recall the behavior of the French Radical Party politicians in the waning days of the Third Republic. (The Radical Party, which governed France then, was anything but.) If mediocrity is the curse of the American political class, the curse of French politics has always been an excess of cleverness, producing a politics dominated by men and (lately) women immensely smart and immensely irresponsible, all tactics and no strategy. Chirac has gone from the Gaullist right to the Thatcherite right, then back to the Gaullist right, and finally to a kind of nostalgic leftish nationalism that he now occupies all alone. His public utterances are not only increasingly embarrassing but weirdly out of touch. Shortly before the Olympic vote, for instance, he was quoted in *Libération* as mocking both British and Finnish cooking—a vote loser by any rational standard and, besides, oddly out of date, since the improvement in British cooking has become a byword among sentient Europeans. Anyway, bad manners, or at least crude insults, as opposed to cosmopolitan condescension, have never before been part of the French diplomatic formula.

French identity is obsessively comparative; there is always an Other. These days, French hopes and fears are focussed obsessively on England and on the figure of Blair. America has drifted right off in the French imagination, like an old rival one competed with for years in the same company, resenting his successes and envying his marriage, only to have him suddenly leave his family, shave his skull, and join a survivalist cult in Montana; you expect to see him some day or other when he comes to his senses, but all you do right now is shake your head. Even Iraq has been, if not exactly in Blair's favor, at least one more sign of his superior suavity; it is common to hear that while France was obviously right about Iraq, the policy of open opposition was, in pure realpolitik terms, a disaster, and that the right thing would have been to sigh in dismay and hold on to America's coat while it foolishly waded in.

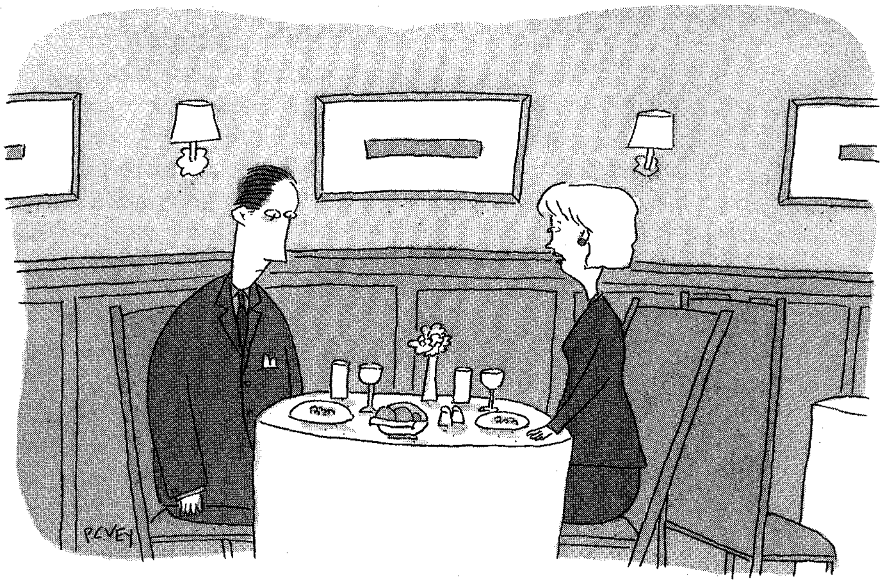
The search for a French Blair has become a new form of political messianism in France. Even Blair's condemnation of the formerly sacred Common Agricultural Policy, which subsidizes French agriculture, was generally applauded in normally leftish publications. For the liberal intellectuals in Paris, this means that their despair is tinctured by the bitter savor of vindication. "I see the things I've been arguing for a decade suddenly appearing as common sense in *Le Monde* and the *Nouvel Observateur*," says Philippe Manière, the director of the Montaigne Institute, which is the first French think tank based on the American model. Manière is the author of "L'Aveuglement Français" (1998)—"The French Blindness"—one of the first books to make a case for modern liberalism in France. Of course, to be a "liberal" in France means to be a believer in the free market; to skeptics, Margaret Thatcher is the ultimate liberal witch. French liberals can't exactly be said to be on the right, since the right in France is nationalist and protectionist. A liberal in France will also just as certainly be passionate about protecting secularism in the schools and in public.

"The situation in France is nearly pre-revolutionary," Manière says, and ticks off the elements that make it so: the rejection of the constitution, the overwhelming mistrust of conventional politicians and politics—or, worse, the absolute lack of attention to what they do or say in public, especially among the young—and the decades-long tenure that makes them so difficult to replace. In every legislative election since 1993, the French electorate has thrown out whoever was incumbent, veering wildly from the left to the right side of the road, like Cary Grant trying to drive while drunk in "North by Northwest."

Nicolas Baverez, who is the author of "La France Qui Tombe" ("Falling France" or, more exactly, "France Is Falling"), a book that was a best-seller last year, insists, "You can't have a Blair without first having a Thatcher." In his view, it was not the nineties that France missed but the eighties. Whatever the historical verdict, the Thatcher years in England stand out as a renewal or reinvigoration. There are tides in history, and the "liberal" tide was one that France missed, largely owing to the Mitterrand years, with their Vichyite spirit of enclosing self-reference. First, Mitterrand dazzled the left and then bankrupted it of ideas and plans; after that, he dazzled the right. Chirac, who for one moment was a kind of reformer, was left mimicking Mitterrand's orotund style.

Mitterrand was a sorcerer; Chirac is merely a magician, pulling yawning rabbits out of an ever more tattered hat. Baverez, a gentle man whose sweetness of temper belies his reputation as a bomb-thrower, thinks that this year's crisis has its roots not only in the nineteen-eighties but in the seventeen-eighties, too. "This entire debate about models is misconceived," he says. "As though there were actually something called a social model and then another thing called the market model. Every Western country has some unique version or other of how it balances prosperity and responsibility. There are many modalities for the construction of a free market, and many modalities for the construction of social protection. But when you criticize the current modalities in France you are seen to be criticizing the entire model—a universalized French theory of right and wrong. The trouble is that France prospered in a slightly unreal bubble for thirty years, and then, with the falling of the Wall, had no real vision or solution to get beyond it."

For many people, on the left and the right alike, hope lies in the improbable figure of Sarkozy. In fact, the nearest thing one can hear to an optimistic plan for the future is the insistence that it is only eighteen months until the election campaign begins and Sarkozy takes over as President. Sarkozy, who also served as Minister of the Interior following Chirac's reëlection in 2002, became the head of the U.M.P., Chirac's recently rebranded political party (the previous one was dispensed with as discredited, and the name change was presumed to fix things). Bizarrely, Sarkozy used the position as a platform from which to attack Chirac for weakness, indecision, and an inability to face France's problems head on. Many people thought that, after the defeat in the referendum, Chirac would pass him the poisoned chalice of the Prime Ministership. Instead, he appointed the former Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin—previously a bad poet and a good biographer of Napoleon—to the premiership, and made Sarkozy Interior Minister again. Since then, Sar-



"A large portion of every meal is donated to charity."

kozy has been at more or less open war with his own leader, mocking his Bastille Day address and generally confirming the French view of Chirac as an exhausted object.

Sarkozy is strange casting for the part of a French Blair, Gérard Depardieu struggling with a part written for Hugh Grant. He is in the "Astérix" mode, a small shrewlike man of action and mind, but, though he is not actually a graduate of the École Nationale d'Administration, like nearly every other French politician, he comes from the same enclosed, incestuous Parisian background. Now he is trying to remake himself as a French Giuliani, the tough guy who will tell unpleasant truths and restore order and energy to a place filled with lassitude. He has made a cause of pursuing the murderers of an eleven-year-old boy in the misery-stricken suburb of La Courneuve, establishing the unexceptionable point that crime is color-blind, and that it is immigrants who suffer most from the failure of policing.

Still, it's hard to believe that Sarkozy is not another Chirac, and pursuing the same cynical opportunism. American journalists love Sarkozy, because they think he loves them, and because they imagine that he is in some way American, or sympathetic to America. In fact, his notion of Americanness is the most French thing about him—it's the equivalent of the hyper-Americanness of that most French of entertainers Johnny Hallyday, the Elvis imitator who has had the longest career of success without new accomplishment of any performer in the Western world. For the French, Sarkozy's is a familiar act, where the Americanness is accomplished by an onstage franticness that passes for energy and authenticity. And then there is the messy business of his personal life—his second wife recently stopped appearing with him in public—which is likely to get messier. "He needs a Laëtitia," someone joked the other day, referring to the fourth wife of Johnny Hallyday, who is supposed to have straightened him out at last.

For this reason, a lot of people think that the Sarkozy boom may be merely a bubble. Despite the semi-messianic hopes that are invested in him, the troubles he is bound to face—the time frame for his ascent seems so long, the personal deficits so obvious, and, above all, there is the reality that France, like Britain, is a firmly center-left country, with an absolute allegiance to social democracy—make it seem likely that a Socialist candidate could still win the next election for President. Even the Chiracian Villepin—who has ostentatious French élan and literary pretension combined with a genuine sense of national destiny and exclusiveness that, however baffling it may be to outsiders, is seductive to French voters—may turn out to be a more potent politician. This summer, he has launched a set of modest hiring-and-firing reforms, and, if he can survive the union push-back that is sure to occur at the moment of the hot reëntry, he is likely to flourish. People will tell you that Villepin is *fou,* crazy, and the wonderful political cartoonist Plantu, in *Le Monde,* has taken to drawing him as a flummoxed Gaelic bard, complete with lyre; but, given the choice between a bard and a busybody, the French have always preferred the bard. A bad bard is at least a bard, while a made-up American is only made up.

For the past twenty years, many people in Paris have been talking in fear about the "Venetian Temptation"—the possibility that France, and Paris in particular, could become another Venice, a perfectly preserved citadel of past glory. What seems in play now is the Italian Interpretation, the possibility of seeing France as Italy has long been seen, as a country that, however misgoverned, thrives through culture, clan, commerce, and clandestine understanding. People in London tell you about the bureaucratic absurdities attendant on their buying and refurbishing houses in the South of France—but they are buying, and the French are benefitting. Enormous sums flow into a black market—most of those refurbishments, as with contractors generally, are cash deals—and the French savings rate is incomparably higher than America's. There is a lot of money at large in this country.

Alain Minc, an essayist and the chairman of *Le Monde*, offers, at breakfast on a sweltering morning, the most eloquent statement of this view. Not

MY MOTHER IN 1970

I kept my long hair in a great red bunch
all those years. I had symptoms: a sensitive mouth;
a languid feeling in the morning.
I sent a few screams up into the air.
A certain someone reminded me of Steve McQueen.

This was in San Francisco.
The blue-gray birds like wide buttons
latching the sea to its shore.
I held out my drink like a lantern.

See my hostage moon growing rounder.
See the seasick bridges, silly string
knit through the hard jewel of the bay.
He said, "Let's try to remember this fondly."
I said, "Gah!"

The people we met at parties had never been
so indistinguishable, even my friend Karen,
who said the other day, "I'm taking more pills
now than when I took pills."

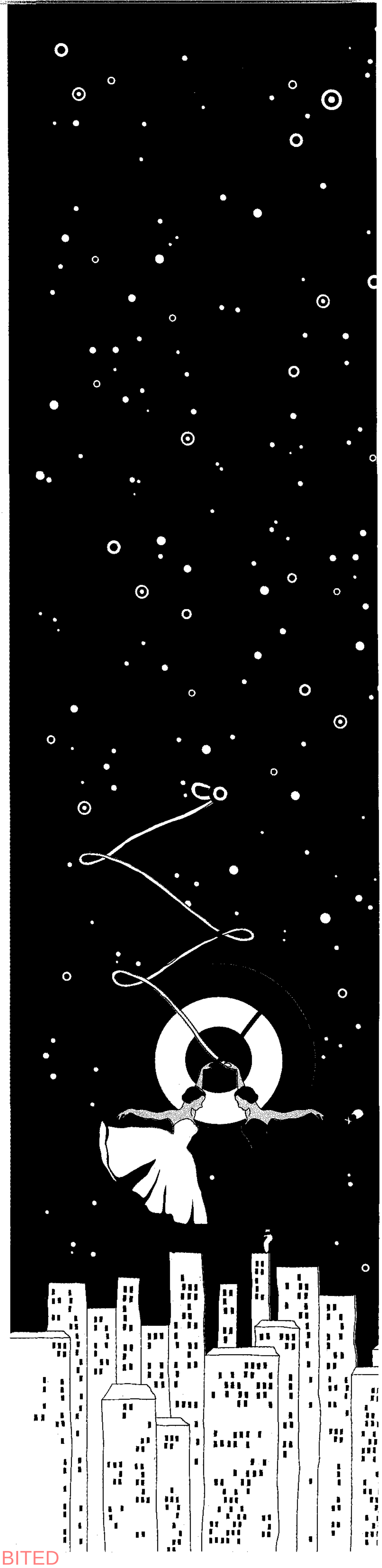
—*Carin Besser*

only does he doubt that the sky is falling but he thinks it seems so close only because the mountain of prosperity has grown so high. "If you talk to French businessmen, the sense of crisis that is so apparent among intellectuals and politicians is effectively nonexistent. A French Thatcher? Well, what caused Thatcher? The 'Winter of Discontent,' nationwide electricity cuts. People sitting in the cold and dark. *That* causes Thatchers; losing the Olympic games does not. In the past year, which stock market has increased the most? New York? London? No: Paris. Businessmen have no loss of confidence, and no sense of crisis. For the average worker, France remains Cockaigne—five weeks' vacation and job security. The problem of unemployment is real, but also exaggerated—only about four per cent of the ten per cent you always hear about represents real unemployment, people who want a job and can't find one. Yes, of course, we need adjustments and modulations, but the Bourse is booming: where people have to bet money, they are immensely confident. The economic picture isn't grim—it's extraordinary." The crucial thing, he insists, is that, for the first time, a Parisian political crisis is no longer a national crisis.

Pascal Bruckner is inclined to doubt that the French can see themselves as lovable Latins, thriving in a broken polity. "France isn't a Latin country, where that kind of withering away of a blocked state is acceptable," he says. "It's a country where the state plays an enormous role—where seventy per cent of the people want to be *fonctionnaires*, and where, more important, the state plays a huge psychological role, as Mother and Father. It is not a country where a crisis of the state can ever be anything but a crisis of the nation." In Baverez's opinion, "This is the fallacy of Plato's cave, where we scoff at the shadows on the wall of the cave and say that there's nothing really there. But the real world exists, outside the cave, and we need to see it."

What is shaping and distorting this moment is the same thing that has shaped and distorted nearly every political moment in Paris since 1789, and that is the French tendency to prefer the poetry of politics to its working out in prose. From that first Bastille Day, when storming a nearly empty prison became the symbol of revolution, and when the Phrygian cap you wore on your head mattered as much as the opinions within it, abstract symbols of belief became as important as their living signs. Social life became, and to some degree remains, a polarized pageant of politics. "We and North Korea are the only countries left that still have a military parade on their national holiday," Alain Minc says. The truth is that while Baverez is obviously right, and the talk of models is mostly empty, the models still matter. Mood and symbol and morale matter as much to a nation as money and social facts and the misery index. Civilizations depend in the first instance and the last on shared optimism, and that is intangible and rooted in symbols (and, to a degree that no one wants to address, in military success; if the Winter of Discontent made Thatcher possible, it was the Falklands that made Thatcherism possible). One has only to look at the new euros to see the core of the emotional problem of having nothing particular to believe in: the euros, standing for so many countries at once, have been cautiously designed to have on them only imaginary bridges and tunnels, anodyne instances of nonexistent engineering, where the old French money had national symbols, Victor Hugo and Voltaire and even the Little Prince. Their loss leaves a hole in your pocket.

As theatre and symbolic pageant, the fireworks for Bastille Day this year were the best that anyone has ever seen: fired off, for the first time in living memory, from within the Eiffel Tower (in the past they were always fired off around the Tower), they exploded in flowers of purple and green, and billowed as brilliant clouds of red and white and blue. Yet, curiously, the fireworks stopped abruptly, with no dramatic climax. Walking home, some people guessed that the display had been meant to end with the Olympic rings crowning the tower, just as in the TV clip, and that things had ended abruptly because no one had bothered to think about what to do if the games were lost. Leaving Paris early the next morning, travelling in a taxi along the Right Bank quai, one saw that Samaritaine remained shuttered, though the two pennants on its roof were still flying. ♦

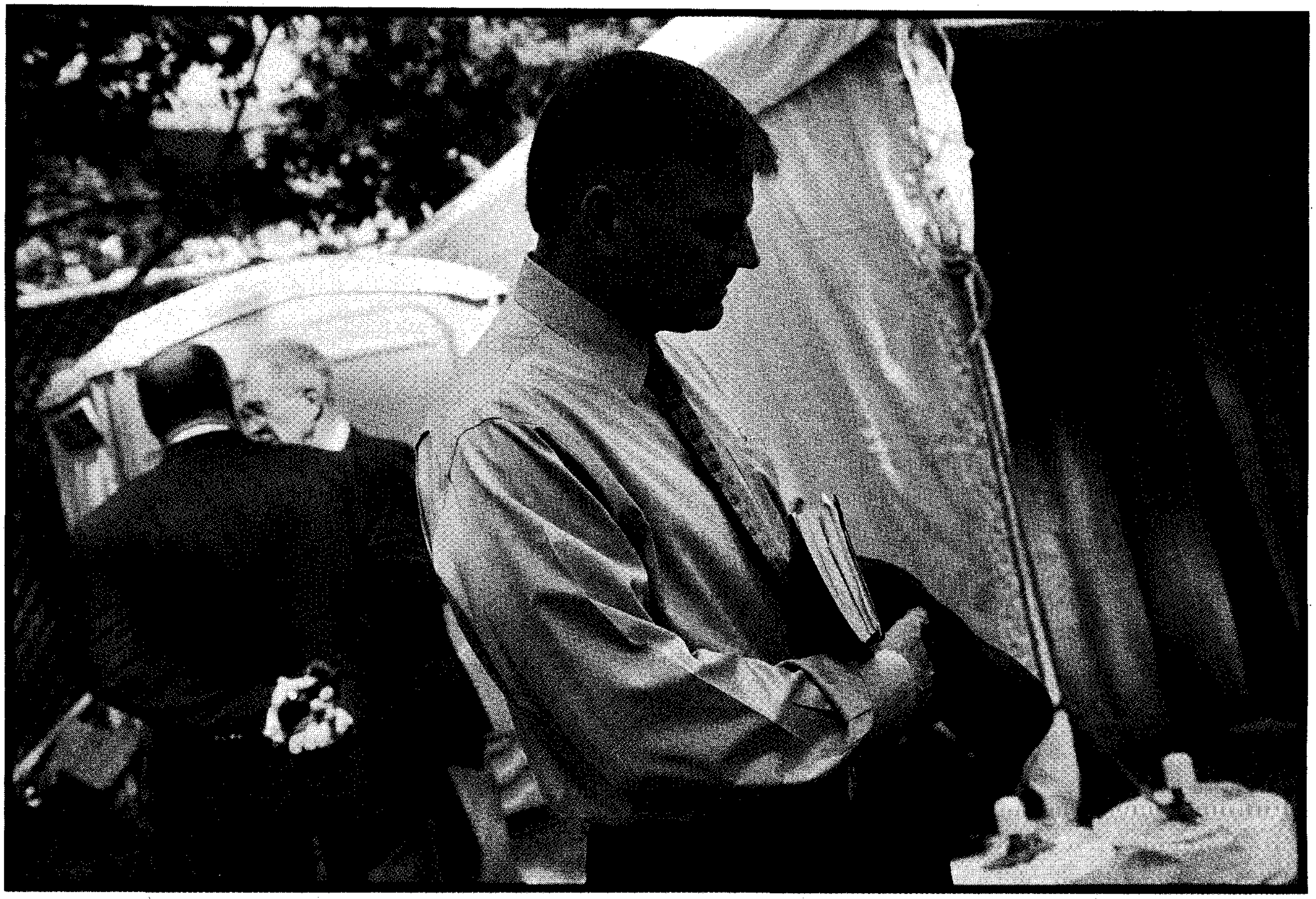


A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE BIG TENT

Billy Graham, Franklin Graham, and the transformation of American evangelicalism.

BY PETER J. BOYER



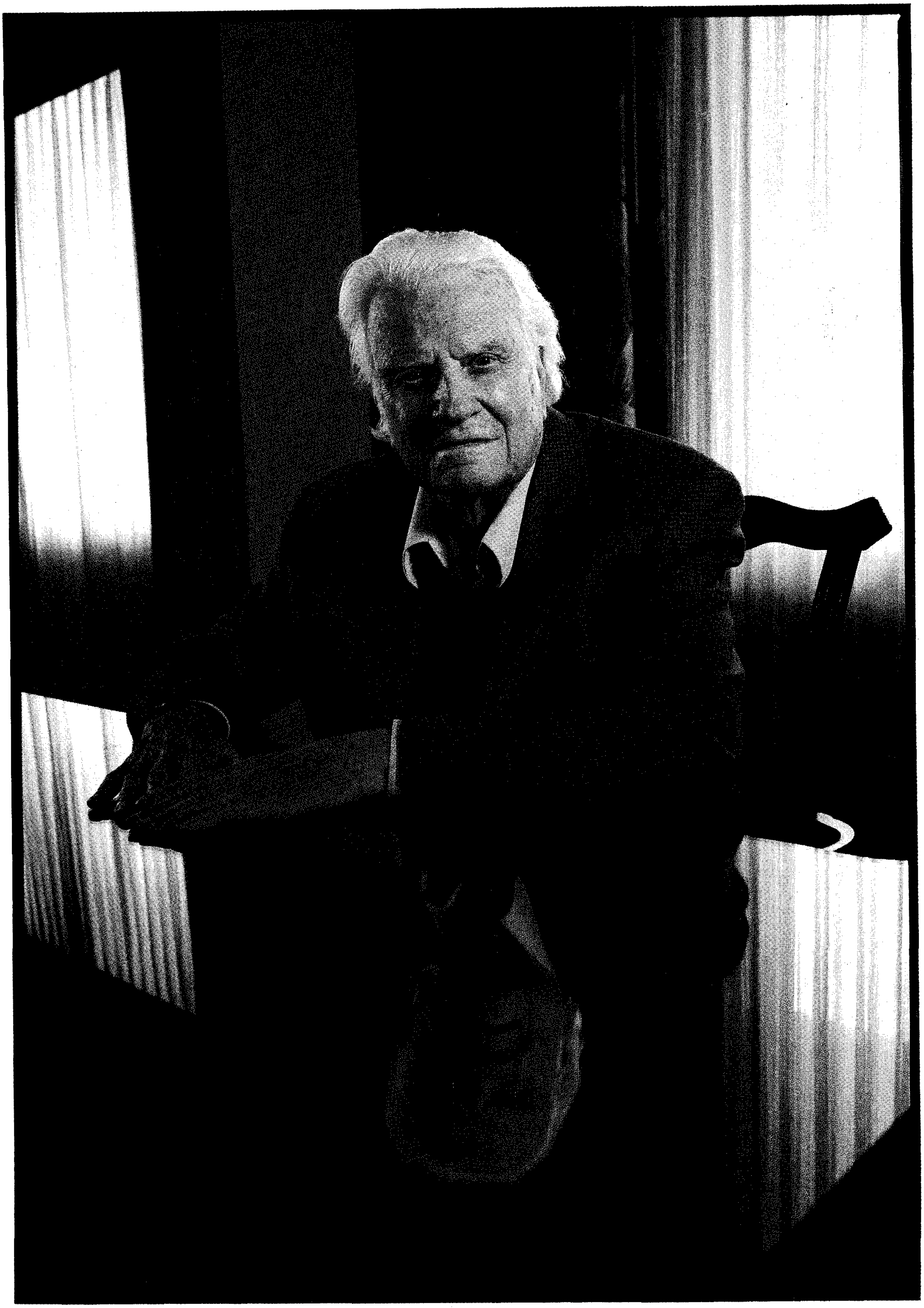
Billy Graham's final crusade had reached the midway point, on a sweltering evening last June in Flushing Meadows, when things took an unexpected turn. Graham, now eighty-six and using a walker, had slowly made his way to the pulpit, aided by his oldest son, Franklin. As the crowd of eighty thousand, seated on folding chairs, awaited his sermon (on the subject of making bad choices), Graham glanced across the platform and acknowledged his special guests, Bill and Hillary Clinton. "They're a great couple," Graham told the crowd. He then recalled a remark he'd once made about the Clintons when they were in the White House. "I felt when he left the Presidency he should be an evangelist, because he has all the gifts—and he'd leave his wife to run the country." At this, Hillary turned to her husband and slapped him a high five.

Bill Clinton joined Graham at the pulpit, and, taking his hand, he said, "What an honor it is to be here as a person of faith with a man I love and whom I have followed. He is about the only person I know who I've never seen fail to live his faith."

Clinton then told a story from his childhood, about attending a Graham crusade with his Sunday-school class in Little Rock. It was during a time of racial disharmony, and Graham had refused the suggestion by some city leaders to segregate his revivals. "I was just a little boy," Clinton said, "and I never forgot it, and I've loved him ever since."

There was, certainly, an element of politics to the moment. Evangelicals are not a known component of the Clinton base, and a blessing from Graham before eighty thousand worshippers has value, but Clinton is convincing on the subject of Billy Graham. We had talked a few days earlier, and the former President recollected that Graham's long-ago stand on race had occurred at a moment when young Clinton, a Southern Baptist, was questioning his own faith. "When he gave the call—amid all the civil-rights trouble, to see blacks and whites coming down the aisle together at the football stadium, which is the scene, of course, of

The father's tolerant message of inclusion uplifted the movement. Will the son be as forbearing? Photographs by Mary Ellen Mark.



our great football rivalries and all that meant to people in Arkansas—it was an amazing, amazing thing," he said. "If you weren't there, and if you're not a Southerner, and if you didn't live through it, it's hard to explain. It made an enormous impression on me. I was at that age where kids question everything, you know? And all of a sudden I said, 'This guy has got to be real, because he did this when he didn't have to.'" Over the years, Clinton formed a bond with Graham—friend of Nixon, Reagan, and the Bushes—and when Clinton's personal troubles emerged Graham publicly counselled forgiveness. "He took sin seriously," Clinton told me. "But he took redemption seriously. And it was incredibly powerful, the way he did it."

For Franklin Graham, sitting next to Hillary on that hot evening in Flushing Meadows, hearing his father and the former President exchanging praise must have stirred some discomfort. He had unreservedly condemned Clinton's liaison with Monica Lewinsky, summoning the Old Testament example of David's carrying on with Bathsheba, and the wrath of God it had produced. "Mr. Clinton's months-long extramarital sexual behavior in the Oval Office now concerns him and the rest of the world, not just his immediate family," Franklin wrote in a 1998 opinion article published by the *Wall Street Journal*. "If he will lie to or mislead his wife and daughter, those with whom he is most intimate, what will prevent him from doing the same to the American public?"

In addition to the family religious enterprise, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, which has some five hundred employees worldwide, a hundred-million-dollar operating budget, and a fifteen-hundred-acre training center in North Carolina, Franklin Graham has inherited his father's chiselled features and his deep Carolina timbre, but politically and theologically the son wields a much sharper sword. Billy Graham has steadfastly avoided pronouncing judgments as he nears his own end (writing that "sincere Christians may differ on whether or not abortion is ever justified," and telling Larry King that God loves even Satan), but Franklin is quite willing to voice what he deems harsh truths. Just that morning, he had told me that the United Nations will fail, because it is a godless enterprise. Abortion is murder, he said, and homosexuality is a sin in the eyes of God. After the attacks of September 11th, Franklin declared that as a religion Islam was "wicked, violent, and not of the same God"—an assertion from which he has hardly retreated.

Predictably, Billy Graham's praise of Bill Clinton and his apparent endorsement of Hillary Clinton's political aspirations excited dismay among evangelicals. Several days later, when the Graham organization issued a "clarification," it was in the name of Franklin Graham. His father had only been joking about Bill Clinton becoming an evangelist, Franklin said. "President Clinton has the charisma, personality, and communication skills, but an evangelist has to have the call of God, which President Clinton obviously does not have, and my father understands that." As for Hillary Clinton, Graham continued, his father "certainly did not intend for his comments to be an endorsement for Senator Hillary Clinton."

Yet it was fitting that Bill Clinton played a part in Billy Graham's last crusade. The two men share a real, if not obvious, kinship, an intuitive communion. Long before Clinton fashioned a "third way" in politics, Graham had figured out how to triangulate American Protestant Christianity.

Graham consolidated that effort nearly fifty years ago, when he opened his first New York crusade, on the evening of May 15, 1957, at the old Madison Square Garden, at Forty-ninth Street and Eighth Avenue. He described himself that night as "fearful," and, indeed, there was much at stake. It wasn't a question of Graham's establishing himself as a national religious figure; he'd already been on the cover of *Time*, had preached to Queen Elizabeth, and had become a pen pal of President Eisenhower. Graham and his team had every reason to expect a successful crusade. The organization's fabled promotional machine was fully operational, as evidenced by the extensive coverage accorded the crusade by the New York press. The *Herald Tribune* let Graham write a daily column on his reflections on the revival. Nearly a third of the campaign's initial budget, of a million dollars, was allotted to advertising and publicity, and the old Garden filled to capacity every night. What was at stake for Graham in that first New York crusade was the evangelist's final break from the fundamentalist wing that had formed him, and his hope of advancing a new evangelicalism that would survive, even thrive, in the cultural mainstream.

The events that brought Graham to that moment, and to a subsequent bittersweet triumph in New York, had huge consequences, including the marginalization of fundamentalists and the steady withering of the mainline denominations. It is largely because of Graham's bold course that evangelicalism—a heterogeneous multidenominational movement estimated to number more than fifty million born-again followers, with best-selling books (the "Left Behind" series), megachurches, and the nation's President, George W. Bush—has attained its current place in American culture as the center of gravity of Protestant Christianity.

In 1918, when Graham was born, to a moderately prosperous Presbyterian farm family in North Carolina, American Protestantism had been a unified faith for fifty years. There were doctrinal differences among Baptists and Methodists and Presbyterians, but the mainline denominations, to which most Americans belonged, shared an orthodoxy that, in contemporary terms, might be called fundamentalist. Most professing Christians believed in the divine inspiration and literal truth of the Bible; the divinity of the Virgin-born Jesus Christ; the vicarious atonement by Jesus at the Cross for a fallen mankind; Christ's bodily resurrection; and the validity of Biblical miracles. There once was, in that sense, such a thing as the Christian nation, for which some religious conservatives still pine.

But the fin de siècle had brought a growing acceptance among educated people of Darwin's theory of evolution, which challenged providential creation; the discipline of "higher criticism" asserted human authorship of Scripture; scholars investigating the "historical Jesus" emphasized Christ's humanity rather than his supposed divinity. In 1907, Henry Adams, recalling the era of his childhood, wrote that "in essentials like religion, ethics, philosophy; in history, literature, art; in the concepts of all science, except perhaps mathematics, the American boy of 1854 stood nearer the year 1 than to the year 1900."

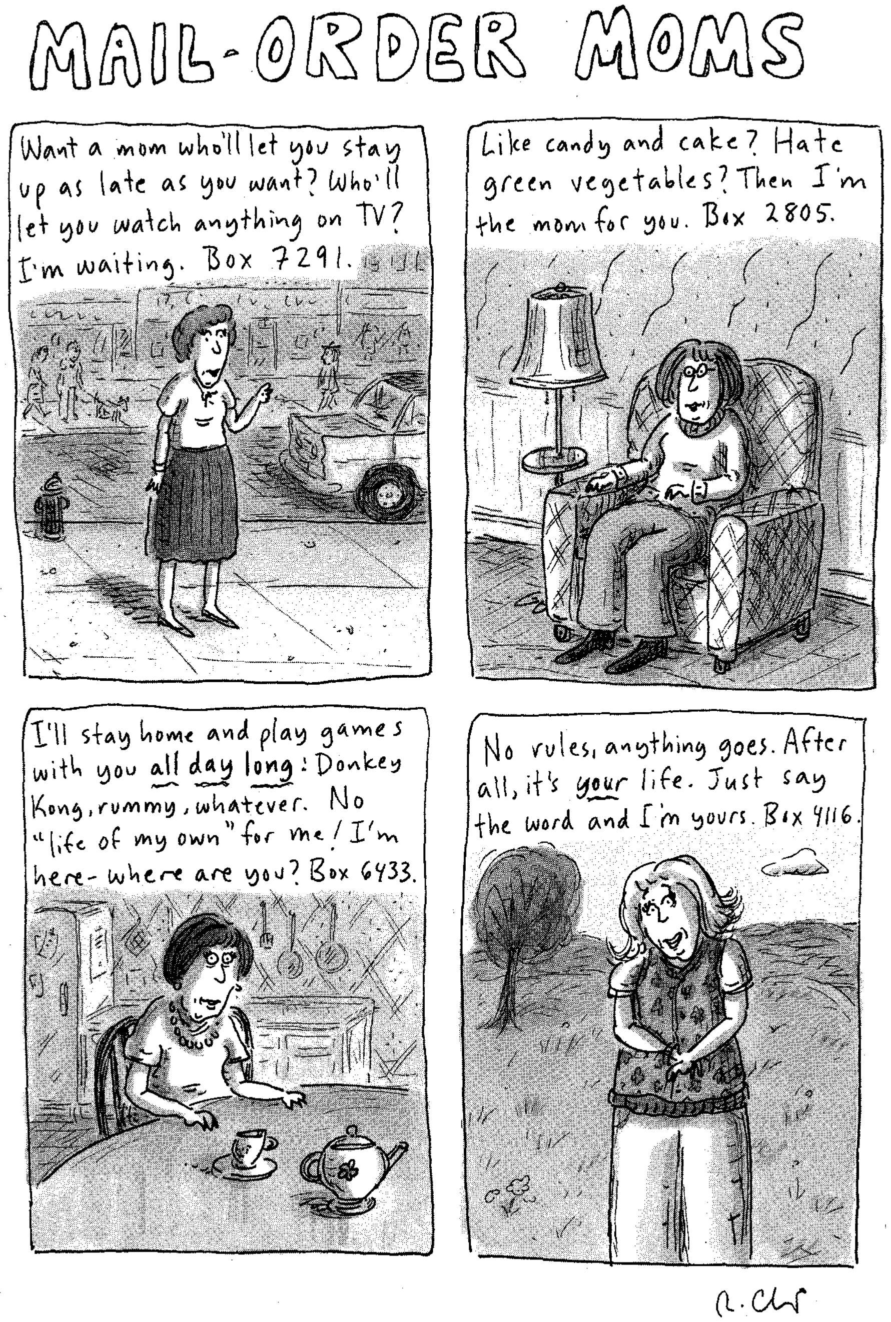
Some theologians, first in Europe, then in American seminaries, assimilated the new thinking and reinterpreted Christianity accordingly. Central to the "modernist" theology was the immanence of God; that is, the notion that the divine will of God could be seen in the progress of man on earth. In this view—the moral-spiritual companion to evolution—mankind was essentially good and wholly perfectible, and would eventually progress to the achievement of God's kingdom on earth. At first, most American Protestants were only vaguely aware of the modernists, and within the denominations, especially the Presbyterians and the Baptists, they were aggressively opposed to modernism. An influential series of books called "The Fundamentals," published between 1910 and 1915, laid out the case for Christian orthodoxy, and provided a body of argument for the opponents of modernism—who came to be called fundamentalists.

The fundamentalists succeeded for a time, but by the nineteen-twenties the modernists, though a distinct minority, had gained influence in the schools and the ecclesiastical machinery of the denominations. As Kevin Bauder, a fundamentalist theologian and the president of the Central Baptist Theological Seminary, in Minneapolis, puts it, "The result was, for a period of about twenty years, there was all-out war in most of the major Protestant denominations."

In the course of that "war," a Manhattan preacher named Harry Emerson Fosdick delivered one of the most consequential sermons ever preached from an American pulpit. Fosdick, a Baptist minister raised in the old orthodoxy, found his faith transformed by a study of the orthodoxy's hindrance to the progress of mankind. Fosdick was hired as the preacher at the First Presbyterian Church on West Twelfth Street, and on May 21, 1922, he delivered his defense of the modernist case. Liberal Christians, he said,

> have assimilated as part of the divine revelation the exhilarating insight which these recent generations have given to us, that development is God's way of working out His will. They see that the most desirable elements in human life have come through the method of development. Man's music has developed from the rhythmic noise of beaten sticks until we have in melody and harmony possibilities once undreamed. Man's painting has developed from the crude outlines of the cavemen until in line and color we have achieved unforeseen results and possess latent beauties yet unfolded. Man's architecture has developed from the crude huts of primitive men until our cathedrals and business buildings reveal alike an incalculable advance and an unimaginable future. Development does seem to be the way in which God works. And these Christians, when they say that Christ is coming, mean that, slowly it may be, but surely, His will and principles will be worked out by God's grace in human life and institutions.

Fosdick's sermon, which he titled "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," posited that "multitudes of reverent Christians," among whom he counted himself, saw the Bible as a human record of the progressive unfolding of God's will, not as the literal Word of God. On the "vexed and mooted question of the virgin birth," Fosdick explained, it was "one of the familiar ways in which the ancient world was accustomed to account for unusual superiority" of a "great personality." The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ, Fosdick said, was an artifact of early Christian hope, explained by the fact that "no one in the ancient world had ever thought, as we do, of development, progress, gradual change,


MAIL-ORDER MOMS
Want a mom who'll let you stay up as late as you want? Who'll let you watch anything on TV? I'm waiting. Box 7291.
Like candy and cake? Hate green vegetables? Then I'm the mom for you. Box 2805.
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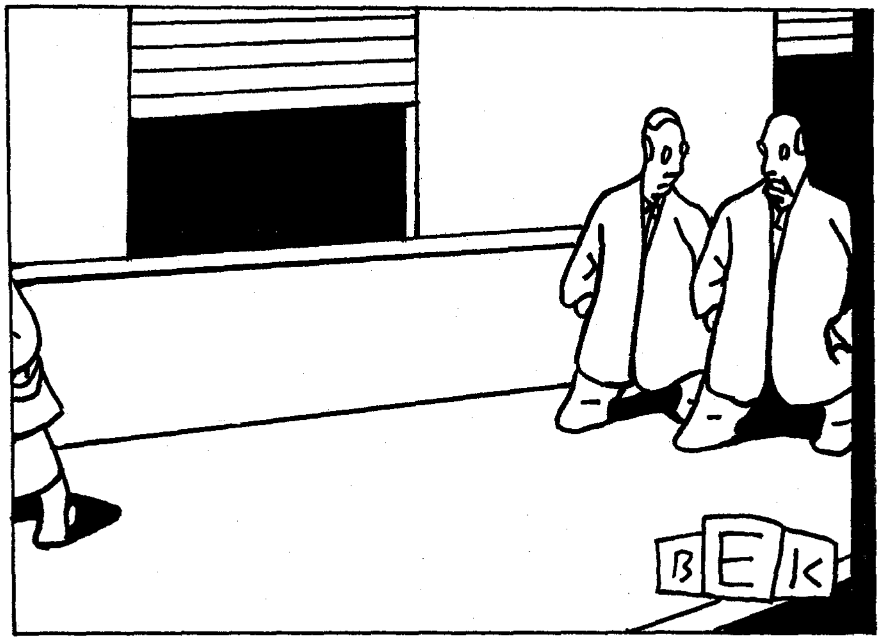
No rules, anything goes. After all, it's your life. Just say the word and I'm yours. Box 4116.
R. Chast



"There is such a thing as a free lunch—it just tastes bad."

• •

as God's way of working out His will in human life and institutions."

To the fundamentalists, Fosdick was guilty of rank apostasy, and the following year J. Gresham Machen, a young theologian at the Princeton Theological Seminary, the citadel of Presbyterian orthodoxy, published a book called "Christianity and Liberalism," in which he argued that a theology that denied Christ's divinity and doubted the Bible wasn't Christianity at all but, rather, a distinct and separate religion. As such, Machen argued, liberal theology had no proper place in the Christian seminary or in the Christian pulpit. That reasoning became the defining logic of the fundamentalist movement, and prompted an effort by the Church's national body to force the New York Presbytery to affirm the fundamentals of the faith from its pulpits. The issue was bitterly disputed at the national convention, with Machen's position being argued by the bedrock fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan. One of Fosdick's fiercest allies was the liberal pastor Henry Sloane Coffin, of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church. The resolution was passed, Fosdick left First Presbyterian, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., built him a new place in which to preach: the Riverside Church, in Morningside Heights, completed in 1930, which became the home cathedral of liberal theology and social activism.

Machen's formulation—that liberal theology represented a false religion that could not coexist with the true faith—had a scriptural basis in the Apostle Paul's warning to the new Christians in Corinth to steer clear of apostates. ("Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.") This separatist impulse, however, carried the risk of schism and eventual marginalization. At the Princeton Theological Seminary, the faculty was soundly orthodox through the nineteen-twenties, but it was divided on the question of whether the Church should accept liberals in its midst or turn them out, as Machen insisted. In 1929, after Princeton added members to its board who were sympathetic to the liberal movement, Machen left, and founded a new school—Westminster Theological Seminary, in Philadelphia.

The "modernist controversy" soon roiled the missionary field, where Christian missionaries like Pearl Buck were confirming the redemptive promise of other faiths. Machen lost the battle to purify the missions, and he left the Presbyterian Church in 1936 to begin a new, militantly orthodox Presbyterian church. Among hard-line fundamentalists, separatism itself became a doctrine of faith, which required "second-degree" separation even from those Christians who held to the traditional orthodoxy but declined to leave their error-stained churches. Once fundamentalists parted from the mainstream, there was nowhere to search for error but among themselves, where much error was found. (One Baptist group separated on the doctrine that only the King James translation of the Bible contained God's pure word.) Within months of its founding, even Machen's new church suffered its own schism, as, eventually, did the new splinter sect.

In the midst of these convulsions, the 1925 prosecution, in Dayton, Tennessee, of the biology instructor John Scopes for teaching evolution actually served to put fundamentalism on trial. Clarence Darrow's ridicule and humiliation of the aging William Jennings Bryan was so effective that fundamentalism, born in theological counter-revolt in Princeton, New Jersey, gained a lasting image of Dogpatch theology. By 1940, it had become an uprooted, disputatious, and contracting faith.

With the Protestant establishment now solidly liberal—more liberal than its congregations—and fundamentalists ever more strident and fractured, there remained a vast body of believers who were faithful to the traditional orthodoxy but felt increasingly untethered. By the nineteen-forties, a group of churchmen had emerged who were the theological kinsmen of the fundamentalists but who were embarrassed by the movement's excesses. They did not share the obsession with separation, and many wished to remain loyal to their denominations and to fight the modernists and liberals from within. Among these was Harold Ockenga, the pastor of the Congregationalist Park Street Church, in Boston. Ockenga had been a student of Machen's at Princeton, and he had followed when Machen established his own school. But Ockenga became one of fundamentalism's severest critics, castigating its self-created impotence. "Fundamentalism has lost every major ecclesiastical battle for twenty years," Ockenga said in a sermon. "Their plan is division in every denomination and every church where Modernism or error appears. The absurdity of division ad infinitum has become apparent."

Ockenga and other like-minded Protestant conservatives undertook the hard work of forging a new movement, which they called the New Evangelicalism. They built seminaries that prized intellectual rigor, where coherent apologetics could be written and young ministers formed in the conservative theology.

The New Evangelicals saw no reason that the work of social justice should be abandoned to the preachers of the "social gospel" in the liberal churches. In "The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism" (1947), one of the new movement's founding figures, Carl F. H. Henry, excoriated fundamentalism's failure to address the world's social and intellectual needs. A key reason for this failure was the widely held belief among conservative Protestants in the doctrine of premillennial dispensation, which holds that the present age ("dispensation") might well be the last before Christ's return to establish a thousand-year reign on earth. This glorious culmination would be signalled by the "rapture"—the lifting up into the clouds of Christ's living faithful—and a seven-year period of tribulation endured by those left behind. The terrible trials of humankind, in this view, might well portend the joyous conclusion of God's long drama of humanity.

The New Evangelicals didn't reject premillennialism or abandon the core tenet of traditional Protestantism—salvation by faith alone. Rather, they proposed that Christians should undertake good works, as evidence of their faith, and engage the secular culture.

By the end of the Second World War, which had effectively demolished Harry Emerson Fosdick's assurances about the perfectibility of man, the two camps within Protestantism's conservative wing stood ready to contend for the spiritually hungry. What was needed was some force to galvanize revival, some new voice to renew the mighty faith.

The vessel into which both the fundamentalists and the New Evangelicals ultimately poured their hopes was Billy Graham. His faith, enunciated in that singular Carolina stage English, was unlined by the doctrinal boundaries that might have excluded either wing. "I didn't know one theological position from another," he recently told me in New York. "I just knew that I had come to know the Lord as my Saviour."

Graham was raised on a dairy farm near Charlotte amid flinty Presbyterians who held firmly to the tenets of the old faith, and as he made his way to his calling, and then swiftly to the first rank of evangelists, the men who influenced him were fundamentalists.

Graham's own salvation was achieved in November of 1934, on the eve of his sixteenth birthday, when he heard an itinerant preacher named Mordecai Ham, whose hellfire revival, in a wooden-roofed tabernacle, was well into its second month. When Graham speaks of Ham now, he is careful to assert that "there are things I don't agree with today that he said and did," an apparent reference to the fact that Ham harbored delusions of a conspiratorial world Jewry. But those delusions would not have stood out in that particular milieu, certainly not to the young man who answered the altar call that night as a choir concluded singing "Just as I Am." Graham was fixed on the preacher's accusing stare, which had so unnerved him on previous evenings that he tried moving into the choir to avoid it, before finally submitting and coming forward to accept Christ.

Graham's parents rejoiced in his decision, and when he graduated from high school they prevailed upon him to put aside hopes of attending the University of North Carolina, and to enroll instead at the small Christian college run by the fundamentalist Bob Jones, in Greenville, South Carolina. To Graham, the place seemed like a reform school, with rules against speaking to girls or dallying in hallways, and curfews that were fiercely enforced by the autocratic Jones. Graham was so unhappy there that he became ill, and withdrew after one term. But, looking back, he attributes his own preaching style to what he learned from Jones during his chapel talks at school. "They were so simple, almost juvenile," Graham recalls. "But he had a power of the Lord through him."

Simplicity was the key, Graham realized, and as he began his own preaching, taking a pulpit wherever he could as he made his way through the Florida Bible Institute and then through Wheaton College, in Illinois, he seldom burdened his sermons with nuance or layers of subtext. You're a sinner, Graham preached, but God so loves you that he's given you a way to save yourself, if you'll only say yes. A Billy Graham sermon was not, in itself, the feature that distinguished his ministry; what set him apart was his uncanny ability to achieve conversions at such a consistently high rate. He'd spent a summer as a door-to-door Fuller Brush salesman, and outsold every other Fuller man in two states. Evangelism is measured in won souls, and Graham's productivity at the altar call was unmatched.

At Wheaton, Graham met his future wife, Ruth Bell, who had grown up in China as the daughter of missionaries and would become his most trusted adviser. Within a year of graduating, he had been given a church pastorship in Chicago and a weekly local radio broadcast, both of which he surrendered in order to become the chief evangelist of a nationwide movement called Youth for Christ, founded by a Chicago pastor to minister to servicemen and young people. In 1947, Graham was summoned to Minneapolis by one of fundamentalism's pioneers, William Bell Riley, who made a deathbed plea that Graham agree to take over Riley's Northwestern Schools, a complex that included a Bible college, a seminary, and a four-year liberal-arts college (now Northwestern College, in St. Paul). And so Graham became, at twenty-nine, the youngest college president in America.

Graham, whose theology doctorates are honorary, has always claimed that his greatest regret is his lack of higher education, and when he found himself in a learned forum he would routinely protest, "I'm not a theologian." That demurral was perhaps justified. The one time that Graham undertook a serious theological inquiry, it nearly took his faith.

The source of his crisis was his close friend and fellow Youth for Christ evangelist Charles Templeton, whom Graham has characterized as one of the very few men he loved. Graham met Chuck, as he called him, onstage at a Chicago rally, and they quickly became the organization's dynamic personalities. The two young men were very different; Graham, with his rawboned amiability, was the essence of country-boy ingenuousness. Templeton seemed to have already lived a full life; a high-school dropout from a broken home in Toronto, he had made his way on his own, starting a successful career as a newspaper cartoonist while he was a teen-ager. Templeton was Graham's equal, if not his better, as a sermonizer, though he couldn't match Graham's conviction and his power at the altar. As preachers, and as friends, they were perfect complements; they roomed together on an evangelistic tour of Europe, swanking around the war-devastated Continent in their loud suits and hand-painted ties, lifted by the promise of their shared gift.

Templeton had a burning intellectual curiosity, which played at Graham's one insecurity, his middling intellectual firepower. For Templeton, however, that searching began to have a corrosive effect on his faith, and he hoped for resolution by applying for admission to the Princeton Theological Seminary. Despite his incomplete education, Templeton was admitted there in 1948. The skeptical ethos of the school, which by then had become firmly liberal, pulled at Templeton's uncertainty, and gradually his faith began to unravel.

In the winter of 1948-49, Templeton and Graham often met at the Taft Hotel in New York, and for hours Templeton would bombard him with the new hermeneutics he'd learned at Princeton, needling him about his simple certainty. Graham would listen, and try to argue, eventually falling back on his default position—he was no theologian. As Templeton later recalled, Graham told him, "Chuck, look, I haven't a good enough mind to settle these questions. The finest minds in the world have looked and come down on both sides of these questions."

But Graham began to have his own doubts. Modernism had given way to neo-orthodoxy in fashionable theology, and Graham started to read the leading neo-orthodox thinkers—people like Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr—with their new definitions of the divine

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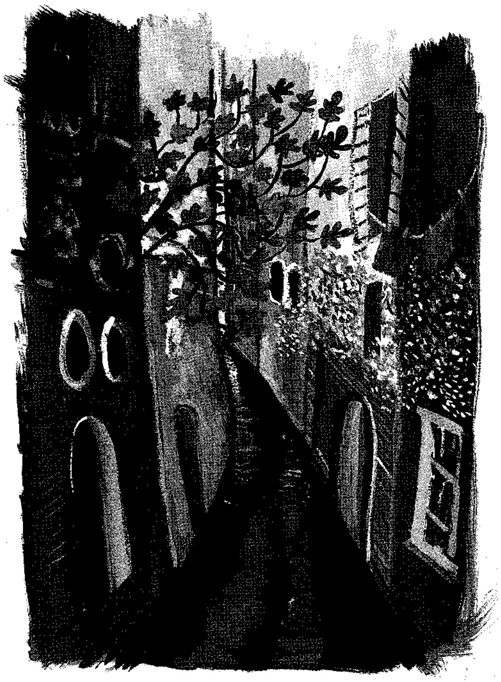
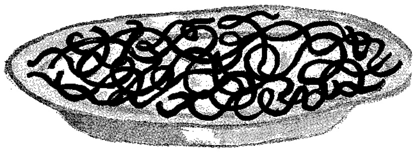
VIS-À-VIS THE VENICE BIENNALE BY MAIRA KALMAN

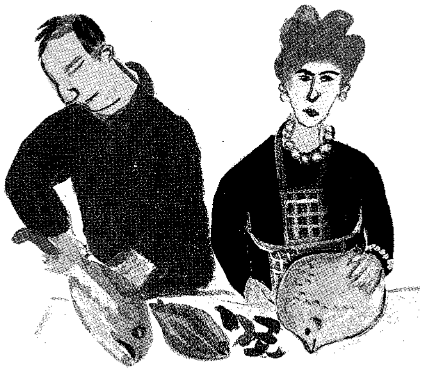
FIRST things FIRST.



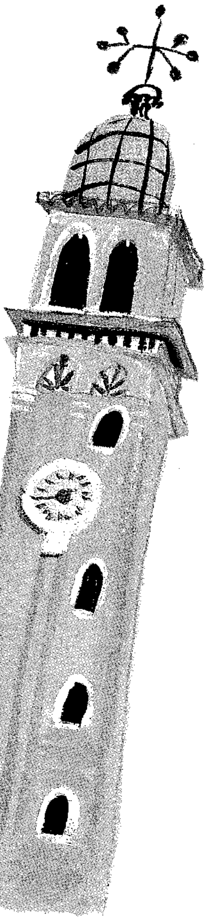
The jasmine and Fig Trees and BRINY air.



BLack Pasta.



A pearly woman selling fish.

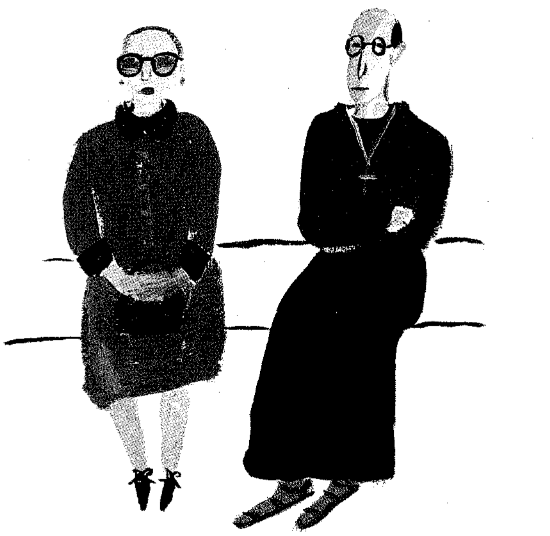


The impossible angle of the church tower.

COFFEE.

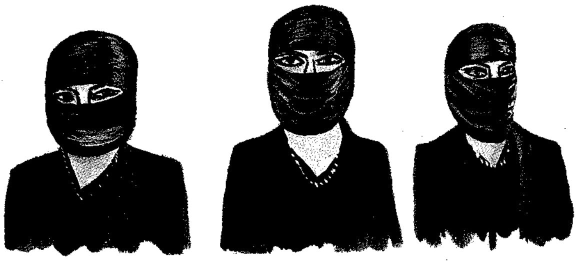
COFFEE.

COFFEE.



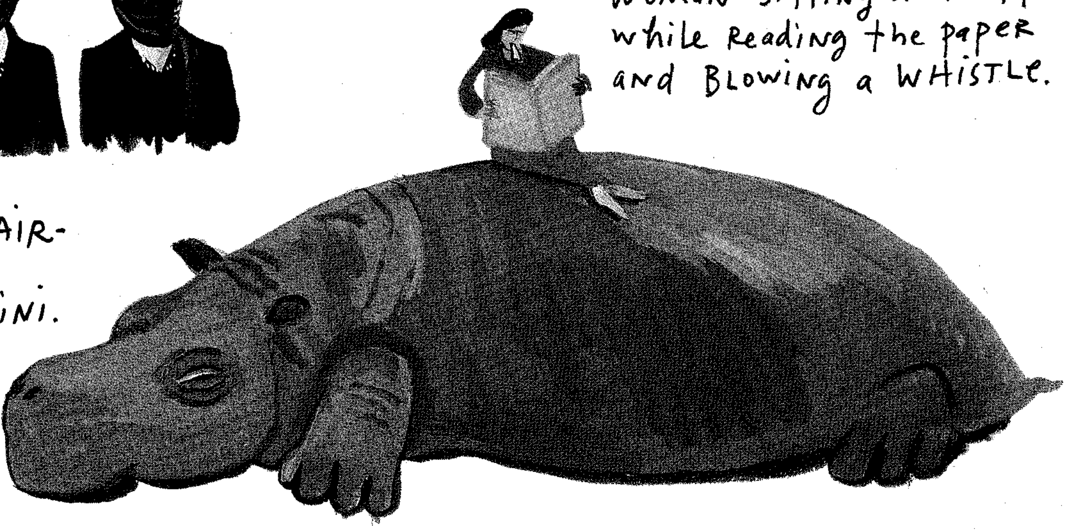
Waiting for the vaporetto to see Stravinsky's grave.

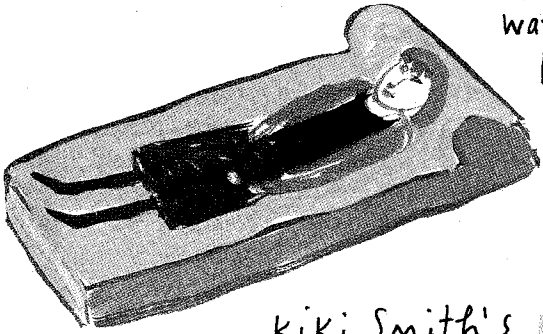
And the ART. There was so much of it you found yourself (and everyone) muttering, "I HATE ART." But then a nap. A stroll. An espresso. And strength is restored. Coraggio, Dickie! What was great?



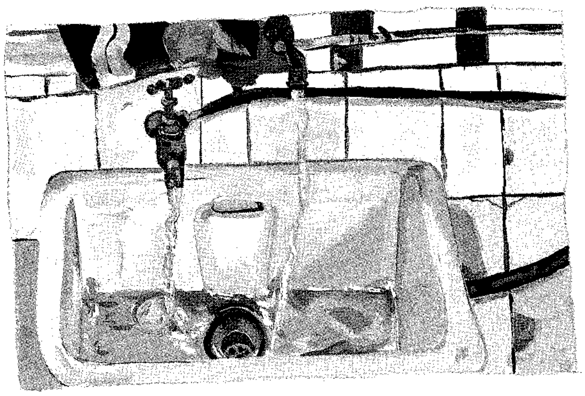
Three women-
Faces veiled with hair-
striding furiously
through the giardini.

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla's
woman sitting on hippo.
while reading the paper
and blowing a whistle.

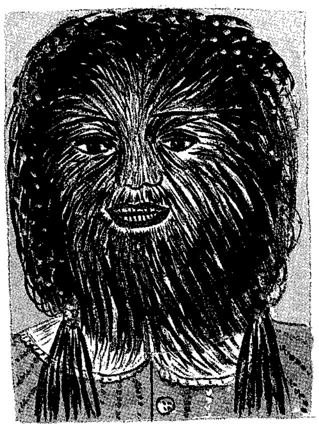




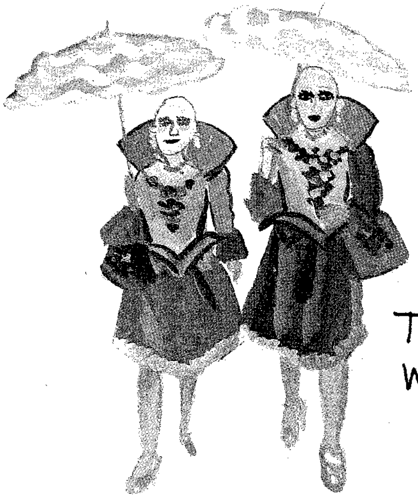
Lying on the floor
of San Stae
watching
Pipilotti
Rist's
films
on the
ceiling.



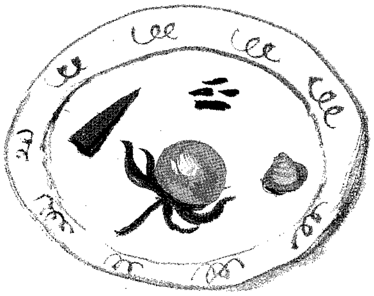
Kiki Smith's
haunting
drawings at
the Querini Stampalia.



The overwhelming
genius of
Lucian Freud at
the Museo Correr.



The pink couple
welcome at all
events.



Did I mention the
sweet alchechengi
berry eaten after a thousand
fried calamari? Oh, ART.

"inspiration" of the Bible. It was a critical moment in Graham's career, because the biggest campaign of his life, a 1949 revival in Los Angeles, was looming.

On the eve of that campaign, Graham attended a fundamentalist retreat in the mountains near Los Angeles, and among the young preachers there was Chuck Templeton. He told Graham, "Billy, you're fifty years out of date. People no longer accept the Bible as being inspired the way you do."

"He said, 'I'm not even sure I believe in God,'" Graham recalls.

Graham's gathering doubt was tormenting him. "I just began to doubt certain passages in the Bible that I couldn't reconcile in my mind," he told me.

Graham knew that he couldn't conduct a revival on such an unsteady spiritual premise, and that he probably shouldn't be heading a Christian school or seminary if he didn't believe what it proclaimed. In crisis, he grabbed his Bible one night, and headed into the woods.

"I had my Bible, and I opened it on the tree stump," he says. "I opened it, and I said, 'Lord, I don't understand all of this Bible. But I accept it all by faith. I accept it.' And at that moment I just had a tremendous conviction, and faith."

The Los Angeles revival was a triumph, helped by a series of fortuitous events. Among the seekers who came forward at Graham's invitation inside the six-thousand-seat revival tent ("the Canvas Cathedral," he called it) was the radio star Stuart Hamblen, who began touting Graham's revival on his broadcast (he also lost a cigarette sponsor by urging listeners to quit tobacco). Another convert was an associate of the mobster Mickey Cohen. William Randolph Hearst, for reasons that he never explained, gave the order to "puff Graham," and his two dailies played the Graham crusade for every angle.

The Los Angeles campaign made Graham a national figure, and was followed by a similar success the following year, in Boston. There, one of his sponsoring churches was the Park Street Church, whose pastor was Harold Ockenga, the father of the New Evangelicalism. Ockenga had nursed doubts about Graham and mass evangelism, but Graham's success in New England convinced him that the movement had found its voice.

One afternoon in the summer of 1955, as Graham was playing golf with the Duke of Windsor on a course near Versailles, he received a telegram from George Champion, the executive vice-president of Chase Manhattan Bank, asking him to hold a crusade in New York in 1957. Accepting the invitation, as Graham did, meant forcing the issue between the New Evangelicals and the fundamentalists once and for all. Champion represented the New York Protestant Council, the defining institution of the liberal establishment Church. The council's sponsorship of the crusade meant Graham's coöperation with liberal churchmen who not only purveyed adventurous theology but, in some cases, denied the very fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy.

Graham accepted the invitation precisely for that reason. He liked the New Evangelical program of engaging the culture, and, especially, of ecumenical fellowship with Christians with whose doctrines he disagreed—even including Catholics. Associating with Rome was, for Protestant conservatives, an error of the most serious kind, for reasons that were foundational to the Reformation: evangelicals believe in *sola fide*, salvation by faith alone, and in *sola scriptura*, that the Bible is the lone source of authority for Christians. But, in the years after the Los Angeles campaign, Graham had gradually decided that doctrinal differences weren't that important among Christians. "I just loved all those people whoever they were," Graham recalls. "They reached out for me. And I responded. I didn't say to them, but I felt, I love these people. They're people of God."

There was, of course, great practical value in Graham's ecumenism. His evangelistic enterprise, based in Minnesota, had branched into publishing, broadcasting, even films, but the core of it all was the crusades, and mass evangelism, as Graham practiced it, required a broad base of local support. "Because Bill was true to his conviction, and didn't criticize people who maybe didn't believe theologically like the others did, but he accepted them all with love, there was a greater willingness to coöperate together," Cliff Barrows, who has been Graham's music director and master of ceremonies since the organization was started, says. "We wouldn't have had some of these great citywide meetings that we've had if he hadn't done that." It was an arrangement that benefitted all parties. Typically, the Graham people would send an advance team to stay in the city a year before the event, and they would persuade local churches to promote and help organize the crusade. In return, Graham's organization would assiduously direct harvested souls into the local churches.

In New York, the Protestant churches were in urgent need of new life, which is why the council had extended its invitation to Graham, despite much reluctance in the liberal establishment. Reinhold Niebuhr, dean of the Union Theological Seminary and the most prominent theologian in the United States, actively opposed the Graham crusade in New York. Graham's message, Niebuhr wrote in *Life,* tended to "negate all the achievements of Christian historical scholarship." Niebuhr worried about "life's many ambiguities," and concluded that Graham's message—Jesus as the answer to life's problems—was "rather too simple in any age, but particularly so in a nuclear one with its great moral perplexities."

Graham, still seeking intellectual respectability, tried to meet with Niebuhr, certain that he could change the theologian's mind, or, at least, temper his criticism. Niebuhr refused to see him. "I had such great respect for him," Graham says now.

Graham's 1957 Madison Square Garden campaign, which had been scheduled to run for two months, lasted nearly the entire summer, culminating in a rally in Times Square, in September, before a crowd the size of a New Year's Eve throng. Later that year, Harold Ockenga declared that the new moderate movement had indeed found its voice—"Billy Graham, who on the mass level is the spokesman of the convictions and ideals of the New Evangelicalism."

To the fundamentalists, however, Graham had become Belial, an Old Testament term embodying godless evil. One fundamentalist has written that Graham, in meeting with the liberal church leaders, "was actually locking himself into a room with the Devil, because these men were certainly the Devil's ministers." Key fundamentalist leaders, such as John R. Rice, the publisher of the fundamentalist periodical *Sword of the Lord*, had kept their claim on Graham until his New York "compromise," as the conservatives called it. "It was an obscuring of the very boundary of Christianity itself," says Kevin Bauder, of the Central Baptist Theological Seminary (the descendant of the seminary that Graham once headed at Northwestern Schools). "What he was doing, from a fundamentalist point of view—from my point of view—was taking religious leaders who had no legitimate claim, properly, to the name Christian, and he was saying to the world, 'These men are good Christian leaders.' And, in doing that, what he was doing, I think, was obscuring the importance of the very Gospel that he was at that time preaching. I think that what Dr. Graham did, and what the Neo-Evangelicals did, is the worst thing a Christian can do."

"I'm sorry, David, but I think it's best to make a clean break."

Graham was deeply troubled by such criticism at the time, but looking back he says, "It doesn't bother me too much anymore." In fact, he had begun to redefine himself as "a theological conservative but a social liberal," as he terms it now. The social liberalism of the New Evangelicalism appealed to Graham, and even Niebuhr allowed that Graham had "sound personal views on racial segregation and other social issues of our time." At that New York crusade, Graham invited Martin Luther King, Jr., to the platform to lead an opening prayer, introducing him as a leader of "a great social revolution going on in the United States today."

Such gestures alienated many conservatives. "Dr. Graham has declared emphatically that he would not hold a meeting anywhere, North or South, where the colored people and the white people would be segregated in the auditorium," Bob Jones said, "and I do not think anytime in the foreseeable future the good Christian colored people and the good Christian white people would want to set aside an old established social and religious custom."

Graham had embarked on a long, inexorable march to the middle, from which he never retreated, and through the years he has progressively softened his views, even on matters touching on core doctrine. As early as his 1949 Los Angeles campaign, when he'd emerged from his battle with doubt, he had decided that Hell was not necessarily a bottomless pit of fire and brimstone but the everlasting punishment of "separation from God." He has stopped worrying about whether pagans are cut off from salvation, and has even come close to syncretism, suggesting that devout believers of other faiths have found ways of "saying yes to God."

Dogmatic fundamentalism had been consigned to the margins, and, with the culture wars and the eruption of international terrorism, the very word became anathema. Even Bob Jones III, the president of the university founded by his grandfather, suggested in 2002 that fundamentalism drop the name. "Instead of 'Fundamentalism' defining us as steadfast Bible believers, the term now carries overtones of radicalism and terrorism," he wrote. " 'Fundamentalist' evokes fear, suspicion, and other repulsive connotations in its current usage. Many of us who are separated unto Christ feel it is appropriate to find a new label that will define us more positively and appropriately." Jones's suggestion was "preservationist," a term that, so far, has failed to catch on.

Liberal establishment Protestantism, meanwhile, has found itself riven by flashpoint social issues like same-sex marriage and the ordination of homosexuals. Even as over-all church membership in the United States continues to grow—by fully one-third since 1960—the mainline churches have seen their numbers shrink by twenty-one per cent. The trend is noticeably evident in New York City. The First Presbyterian Church continues its ministry in the liberal tradition of Harry Emerson Fosdick, but the most vital Presbyterian church in New York is an evangelical church, Redeemer Presbyterian, that was founded in 1989 and meets in rented spaces, such as the auditorium at Hunter College. Redeemer Presbyterian was begun by Timothy Keller, a graduate of Machen's Westminster Seminary, as a ministry for evangelical city professionals, and has grown so prodigiously that the church actively shuns publicity for fear of overgrowth and an influx of "church tourists." Its Sunday meetings at Hunter attract a capacity congregation of twenty-eight hundred worshippers, and that is just one of Redeemer's three Sunday services. The church has spun off more than a score of "plant" churches in the city and elsewhere, including one, the evangelical Emmanuel Church, that holds its weekly services in the James Chapel at the Union Theological Seminary—formerly presided over by Reinhold Niebuhr.

Evangelical churches and organizations have experienced remarkable growth—owing, in large part, evangelicals say, to the doctrinal latitude and character of moderation established by Graham and the New Evangelicals. "I think it put a friendly face on what was thought of as fundamentalism," Greg Laurie, the senior pastor of the megachurch Harvest Christian Fellowship, in Riverside, California, and a member of the Graham association board, says. "It was appealing, it was engaging, there was a cultural connection. Yet, at the same time, it did not compromise the essential Gospel message, or the Biblical emphasis."

It is telling that Graham, for his final crusade, chose as his New York chairman Dr. A. R. Bernard, of the Christian Cultural Center, in Brooklyn. Bernard, a former Black Muslim, began his ministry with a storefront church that has grown into a Texas-size megachurch (with a restaurant, fish ponds, and gardens) that is attended by twenty thousand worshippers each week. "We hold to Christian orthodoxy," Bernard says. "We hold to the authority of Scripture, and we're very conservative in our views. But we're not antagonistic to the culture. We believe that we can be a prophetic voice in that culture, understanding that culture, adjusting to it, without compromising our convictions. For too long, Christians tended to speak in a language that only other Christians could understand."

Endorsement of the New York event was hardly unanimous among black church leaders. A few weeks before the crusade, Dr. Calvin Butts, the pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, said that he'd heard several complaints from his parishioners about Graham's promotional effort in Harlem, which included a huge billboard on 125th Street. "I believe he has the right to come to New York and preach the Gospel—we do have religious freedom in this country," Butts told me. "Having said that, I personally believe that he's been an apologist for political right-wingers his whole career."

Although Graham came to avoid political pronouncements, his orientation early on reflected the conservatism of his native region. His particular closeness with Richard Nixon stained his reputation, not least because of tape transcripts recounting a White House conversation in which Graham denigrated Jews (for which he has apologized, often and abjectly, offering to crawl on his knees for forgiveness). Yet Graham, a longtime registered Democrat, did not cultivate only Republican political leaders. When the first President of his acquaintance, Harry Truman, shunned him at a 1952 crusade in Washington, dismissing him as just another religious huckster, Graham importuned him (unsuccessfully) with flattering pleas. Through the years, Graham assiduously pursued the favor of men of high office, winning his way into the Presidential circle with his Fuller Brush salesman's cheery persistence. He golfed with President-elect Jack Kennedy in Palm Beach and with former President Gerald Ford in Palm Springs—and prayed with every President. For politicians, association with Graham brought a very particular sort of public endorsement, as well as the private solace proffered in low moments, such as those endured by Lyndon Johnson and Nixon. For Graham, his association with world leaders satisfied his need to be seen as "somebody who stood in the circle of other somebodys," as his biographer William Martin phrased it.

MY HUSBAND'S BACK

Sunday evening.
Breakdown hour. Weeping into
a pot of burnt rice. Sun dimmed
like a light bulb gone out
behind a gray lawn of snow.
The baby flushed with the flu
asleep on a pillow.
The fire won't catch.
The wet wood's caked
with ice. Sitting
on the couch my spine
collides with all its bones
and I watch my husband
peer past the glass grate
and blow.
His back in a snug plaid shirt
gray and white

But Graham also achieved another purpose in becoming the preacher to Presidents. He became the symbol of Protestant Christianity in America—in effect, branding evangelicalism as the mainstream American faith. The feat made him welcome not only in Nixon's White House but in Kennebunkport, Maine, in the high Episcopal home of George H. W. Bush. It was on a 1985 visit to that vacation home that Graham, walking on the beach with Bush's prodigal son, George W., posed the question, Are you right with God? For the younger Bush, it was a life-altering moment. ("Billy Graham didn't make you feel guilty," Bush later wrote. "He made you feel loved.") Graham had found a soul perfectly suited to the simple faith.

William Franklin Graham III was also, through much of his young life, a devoted heller—the embodiment of "preacher's kid" syndrome, magnified by the fact that his daddy wasn't just any preacher. Franklin smoked, drank, rode motorcycles, and once led the local police in a car chase, safely escaping at the last moment by dodging through the Graham estate's electronic gates. (His father let the police in, and Franklin was warned that he'd go to jail next time.) He wanted to fly, and got a pilot's license, and then crashed a plane while making an ill-advised landing. He was urged to

leaning into the woodstove
is firm and compact
like a young man's back.

And the giant world which swirls
in my head
stopping most thought
suddenly ceases
to spin. It sits
right there, the back I love,
animal and gamine, leaning
on one arm.
I could crawl on it forever
the one point in the world
turns out
I have travelled everywhere
to get to.

—*Susan Minot*

leave two Christian schools, where he was inclined to fighting and breaking the rules, and as for church he says, "I found it kind of boring."

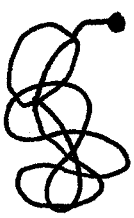
When he was twenty-two, his father approached him one day and, as Franklin recalls it, said, "I sense there's a battle for the soul of your life. You're going to have to make a choice—either to accept what Jesus Christ did on Calvary's Cross, or reject it. You can't ride the fence. You, Franklin, are going to have to make a decision. And I want you to know that your mother and I are praying for you, that you'll make the right decision." Franklin says that he got on his knees that night, threw away his cigarettes, and surrendered his life to God.

In the space of a few weeks that summer, Franklin graduated from a local two-year college, married his boyhood sweetheart, Jane Austin Cunningham, and took up studies at a Bible college in Colorado. At his wedding, he had publicly vowed to devote his life to God's service, but he was determined to avoid any calling that might invite comparison to his father. This became the central tension of his new life; yet, a year later, in the summer of 1975, he and his wife were living with his parents and the only work he had was helping in his father's crusades. A way out appeared one day when Franklin received a phone call from an evangelist named Bob Pierce, who was, by nature and by calling, something like an anti-Billy Graham.

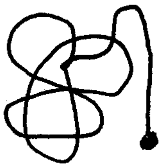
Pierce had been a contemporary of Billy's at the beginning, another young evangelist in the wartime Youth for Christ movement. It was a boom time for evangelism, but somehow Pierce, who had attended a small religious college in California, struggled in his ministry even as Graham and Chuck Templeton soared. (Templeton eventually left the ministry and returned to Canada, where he took up journalism and rose to become managing editor of the Toronto *Star*.) Pierce showed up one day at the Youth for Christ Chicago headquarters in a deep gloom, determined to quit the pulpit; but the organization sent him to the West Coast, and eventually to Asia, where he found his calling. In China, Pierce encountered social disorder, poverty, and human misery of a magnitude he could scarcely register; but there was also a deep spiritual hunger amid that squalor, and the combined effect was strangely exhilarating. He wrote home that, after his experience in Asia, he couldn't imagine a return to preaching in America again, "to just go through the motions of evangelizing."

One day, a missionary thrust a Chinese girl into Pierce's arms, saying that the child had been beaten and thrown into the streets by her father, who was angered by the attentions she'd received from the Christian missionaries. Pierce immediately handed over all the cash in his pocket, and vowed that he would personally see that the child's education was paid for. It was a rash promise that Pierce had no rational expectation of keeping, but China had somehow tilted his senses. When the Maoist triumph brought the eviction of Christian evangelists, in 1949, Pierce found other locales, and new exhilarations. Making rash promises became his standard mode of operation; yet he also began to make good on such promises. On trips back home, he toured churches and Christian organizations, showing movies of the distant sorrows he'd promised to ease, and the central feature was almost always a hungry child. People responded beyond Pierce's hopes, and through the nineteen-fifties he built an organization, World Vision, that became the largest Christian aid enterprise in the world.

Pierce was driven in his mission by a kind of reckless zeal, praying for the ability to personally experience God's own heartbreak for his most broken people, to take on their suffering—and then gambling that God would somehow make good on Bob Pierce's promises to them. The method exacted a toll. Pierce was given to bursts of pique, followed by remorse, and, as World Vision grew, his personality and operating style unsettled the Christian enterprise. After a bitter dispute with the World Vision board in 1967, he was forced to resign from the organization. His personal life was no less unsettled. He suffered a mental breakdown, and was undergoing insulin shock treatments. A few years later, he learned that he had leukemia.



It was in this low period that Pierce came to believe that there was something of himself in Billy Graham's prodigal boy, Franklin. He knew that Franklin was newly married and at loose ends, and in that phone call he invited Franklin to take an Asian tour with him that would be nothing like the overseas journeys Franklin had experienced with his father. Franklin agreed, and over the next two months the dying Pierce pitched Franklin Graham on the great adventure of doing God's work, but on an entrepreneurial level. Pierce had built a small aid organization, Samaritan's Purse, whose mission was to fly into the world's emergency zones, assess the need, and then somehow raise the money that Pierce invariably had committed. In one particularly fitting episode on the trip, the small entourage, in a Cessna 185, landed on a narrow strip cut into a mountain in the jungle of Borneo, halting at the edge of a steep ravine. Pierce's thrill-ride evangelism spoke to Franklin, and he took over Samaritan's Purse shortly after Pierce died, in 1978.



One of Franklin's early aid trips took him to a remote missionary hospital in Kenya, an overtaxed facility where patients were treated two to a bed. Before leaving, Graham promised to try to raise the four hundred thousand dollars needed to build a new wing. He told the story of the hospital on Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's "Praise the Lord" television broadcast, raised four hundred and nine thousand dollars, and then later returned the extra nine thousand to Bakker. Graham wanted Samaritan's Purse to be unlike any other organization, and certainly distinct from a Christian aid bureaucracy, and his ideas were sometimes impractical or misbegotten. He once tried to transform the compound at Jonestown, Guyana, where in 1978 hundreds of religious cultists died in a mass suicide, into a resettlement camp for Southeast Asian boat people. During the first Gulf War, he sent thousands of Bibles, translated into Arabic, to American soldiers encamped in Saudi Arabia—a move that infuriated the commanding general, Norman Schwarzkopf, who said that it threatened to unravel the fragile coalition.

But Graham began to apply a disciplined hand and sound practices to Samaritan's Purse, and the organization has become a highly regarded two-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar enterprise. (Less than four per cent of its annual revenues go to fund-raising expenses.) It carries out substantial relief operations in more than a hundred countries, including Iraq, India, and Sudan. Preoccupied with his work, Franklin stoutly resisted any suggestion that he take up the pulpit. "I was afraid that if I did preach, people would compare me to my father," he says. "I'm not my dad."

In his way, Franklin Graham had at last answered one of his father's severest critics, Reinhold Niebuhr, who had long ago written that the trouble with Billy Graham was that he talked the talk of social progress but his simple ministry of soul conversion did little to help the wretched of the world. "I believe that my father has been called to the big stadiums of this world," Franklin told an interviewer. "God has called me to the ditches and to the gutters along life's road."

Franklin's resolve not to preach began to weaken in the nineties, as his father started to grow infirm. He finally received the divine call to preach, although he concedes that God's beckoning to him was more clearly heard by others (including his mother) than by him. He started out shakily. "There was a tentativeness," says Anne Graham Lotz, Franklin's older sister, who is also a preacher (deemed the best in the family by her father, though she had no desire to succeed him). "He hadn't got the delivery, and the style, and all of that down. He was a little uncomfortable. But you could hear his heart. And I believe he has a heart for the Gospel."

Franklin's decision to preach did not settle the issue of succession at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and in some ways complicated it. Franklin, who is fifty-three, says that some in the organization questioned his commitment before he took over as C.E.O., in 2000. "There were a lot of internal struggles," he says. "There were people at that time who did not want me doing it. It was a challenge.... They had legitimate concerns and questions." Part of the difficulty was Billy himself, who had always run the organization with a light hand, ruling by consensus, and he did not want to appear to be steering the enterprise toward his son. He wonders now, he says, whether Franklin thinks he didn't do enough. "I feel sometimes he may be disappointed because I don't intervene," Billy says. "I haven't talked to anybody about him, to try to get something for him in the organization." Franklin's management style is more direct than his father's, and he is less inclined to consensus. He has consolidated the workforce and moved the organization's headquarters from Minneapolis, where it had been since Billy Graham's days at the Northwestern Schools, to Charlotte, where the Grahams live. (Samaritan's Purse, which he still runs, is also headquartered in North Carolina.)

Although Franklin's preaching style is cooler and more conversational than his father's, he is much less willing to smooth the edges of the faith. If Billy's theme, especially in his later years, was the saving grace of God's love, Franklin's is more elemental. "My message is very focussed," he says. "My message is to call on people to repent their sins." Franklin believes in a sulfurous Hell, and has no doubt about who is going to be there. "The Bible says every knee under the earth, every knee that's in Hell, one day is going to bow," he says. "And every tongue is going to confess Him as Lord one day. Now, either you're going to do it voluntarily and submit your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, or you're going to be forced. And when you're forced it's going to be too late then."

Franklin Graham's strongest trait is certitude, which extends to the divisive issues that Billy chose to avoid. Regarding Islam, Franklin says, "The global war on terrorism, let's give it the name—it's Islamic. That's who we're fighting. We're not fighting the Maoists. We're not fighting the Hindus or the Buddhists. It's Islamic." As to the refrain that a peaceful religion has been "hijacked by terrorists"—a refrain sounded even by his friend the President—Franklin scoffs. "They haven't hijacked it at all. I think that's what people are wishing. And listen, there are millions of Muslims out there who are good people, who do want to live in peace. But you have to look at the government of Saudi Arabia; this is what true Islam is. There is no tolerance of other religions or other faiths. True Islam, just look at Saudi Arabia, that's it. Or look at the Taliban, that's it. Or Sudan. That's what this is all about."

Abortion, Franklin asserts, is not about a woman's reproductive choice. "I believe that abortion is murder," he says. "Now, that has nothing to do with politics, left wing, right wing. I believe that when a woman's right to choose takes the life of another person, that's a sin against God. The state says you can do this, it's legal. O.K. It's still a sin against God. And that blood of that child, God will hold you accountable. That blood is on your hands." Homosexuality is likewise a sin against God in the younger Graham's system of faith, and he disputed the justification that homosexuals are created that way by God. "Listen, sin is sin, O.K.? The Bible says that we're all sinners. We're born with it. We all have this desire to sin, to disobey God. Now, we try to make excuses as a society. . . . For the gay, I mean, it's 'Well, I have no choice. I was born this way.' Well, we were all born sinners, with the desire to sin."

Such pronouncements have led some people to dismiss Franklin Graham as just another right-wing Jeremiah. Yet he may well emerge as the most important political figure in the evangelical sphere. In his aid work, he is as tough and insistent as he is in running the Graham organization, or in laying out his theology. Some on the left see a neocolonial missionary impulse in his motivations, and Graham is unrepentant about the fact that his do-gooding is solely a means of bringing people to Christ. One of his inspirations was to put wells on church property in a parched zone of India: "Have people come to church to get their water. Why not?"

But it was Franklin Graham who brought Christian zeal to the struggle against the world AIDS pandemic. Samaritan's Purse had become deeply involved in trying to stop the slaughter of Christians and animists in Sudan, and in the course of this political effort Franklin had awakened to the realization that fighting AIDS was also God's will. He began to sound the alarm among evangelicals, chastening Christians for their past reluctance to fight against a scourge that somehow offended their moral piety.

For the last three years, Richard Holbrooke, Bill Clinton's former Ambassador to the United Nations, has asked Franklin Graham to speak at the annual fund-raiser for the Global Business Coalition on H.I.V./AIDS. There was some awkwardness on the first occasion, in 2002, because Graham was seated at a table with Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Bill Clinton. Holbrooke recalls telephoning Clinton before the event and asking if he thought it would be all right. "Sure," the former President said. "It's a smart thing to do."

At that event, Graham offered the benediction, praying, as he always does at public events, in the name of Jesus. And, as always happens at public events, some people complained. "I'm not going to betray the blood of Jesus Christ for political correctness," Graham says.

But Holbrooke counselled forbearance. "Some people were upset," Holbrooke recalls. "They said, 'Why do you have that guy there?' And I said, 'If we want to beat AIDS, we need to build bridges to people in areas that we agree on.'"

Holbrooke says that Graham has been "enormously important" in the fight against AIDS abroad. "Samaritan's Purse created one of the most important new developments in American foreign policy in the last generation—the entry of Christian conservatives into American foreign policy as pro-foreign-aid people."

Billy Graham says that he approves of Franklin's public stands, theological and political. He adds that, even if he doesn't agree with his son, "he's strong."

It is, perhaps, a case of the son finding his own way to a middle ground. Franklin Graham has managed to win the admiration of a former Clinton Administration official, even while his public positions have some old-line fundamentalists listening, hopefully, for the return of an evangelist Graham to their fold. "He intrigues me," the hard-line theologian Kevin Bauder acknowledged recently. Though he still condemns the elder Graham's 1957 "compromise" as "the worst thing a Christian could do," Bauder said, "I think we're still getting to know Franklin Graham. I don't think we've quite figured out who he is yet. But I'm very interested to find out. Franklin, every time he says something publicly, my ears pick up. I want to chart this guy. I want to see where he's going." ♦

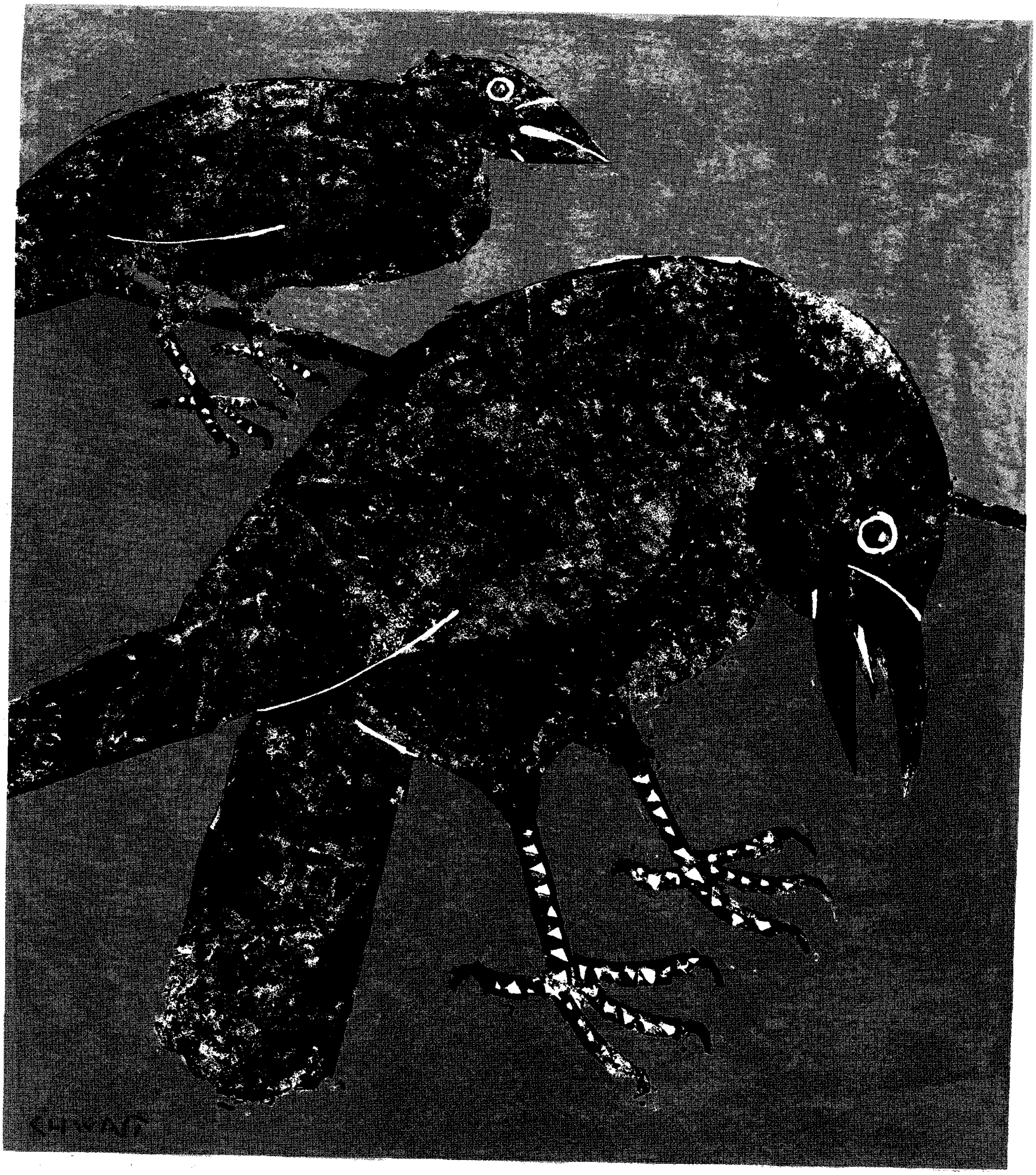
27" FLAT-SCREEN MICROWAVE!
DIFFEE

"It's great for quesadillas."

FICTION

THICKER THAN WATER

BY GINA OCHSNER



In the spring of 1988, Vasya Brkic, waking from a dream in which she was a wolf, bit her husband's neck and killed him in the bed they shared. The following spring, Marti Cosic, a saxophonist in a klezmer band, went crazy and killed his fellow band members—all seven of them—then beat himself to death with his saxophone. One year later, after swimming naked in the newly thawed River Daugava, Semyon Iossel, an unemployed engineer, built a flying machine and died after falling from a great height. His grieving widow distracted herself for a year by giving lectures on the dangers of gravity, then succumbed to a mysterious urge to throw herself in front of the Riga-Tallinn train and was pulped on the tracks.

Every spring, like clockwork, there was another death in the small community of Russian Jewish émigrés in our little town just outside Riga. Each time, Father, who worked at the cemetery just beyond our house, was one of the first to hear about it. The black phone in our kitchen would ring, and off he'd go to dig the hole. Mother was not very enthusiastic about this phone, which had been installed, she said, only to deliver bad news. "And who makes all this bad news?" she asked as we crowded at the front door to watch the approach of the coffin of Galina Gorskilevna, a young copy editor who had possessed frayed nerves and a rope strong enough to hang herself with. "Foreigners!" Mother answered her own question. We squinted at the long procession of women dressed from head to toe in black who followed the coffin. Behind them was a line of men in the black hats that Rudy once told me in confidential tones were called Schwartze Nipples.

Mother shook her head. "Everything they do is always so overstated and dramatic. Why can't Jews die quietly, like the rest of us?"

"Such a spectacle," Father agreed, joining us at the door.

Once the mourners had passed, we followed them to the burial site, where we stood at a distance beneath the bare alders. We were there to offer our condolences, and also because it was Father's job to make sure that the gate was closed for the night after everyone left.

Later, as Rudy and I crawled into our separate beds, I said, "The Jews must be really sad to rush their deaths like that."

"They don't have a land of their own. That's why they're so sad," Rudy said, stroking the wispy fuzz above his lip and under his chin. He was three years ahead of me at School 42, which had recently been renamed after the new Latvian leader but which people still called No. 42. According to Rudy, the Jews were the reason that the heavy German Heinkels had pounded our country so flat during the war. The Jews were the reason that unemployment in Latvia was on the rise. And the émigré Jews from Russia were the worst kind of Jews, because they didn't even bother to speak Latvian. On weekends, when he had had too much to drink, Father said that the new Latvia was a wolf shaking the fleas off its back. And everyone knew who the fleas were.

But I couldn't seem to get enough of the Jewskis, as Mother called them. They had names that evoked distant lands, and they knew things that the rest of us didn't. I was fourteen, and drama and romance had suddenly become important to me: I had bad skin and stringy hair and I couldn't find one romantic thing about our little house by the cemetery, where our garbage stank, and our laundry flapped from clotheslines on windy days, and our kitchen always smelled of simmering cabbage and carrots.

My only friend at the time, Judite Ilmyen, felt the same way I did about drama and romance. She talked a lot about suicide and the futility of life while contemplating the sky and sighing tragically. She lived in the house opposite ours and looked, according to Mother, suspiciously German, though in fact she was a Russian Jew. Because Judite was Jewish, it was a long time before I was allowed to visit her. Even then, I went only under the watchful eye of Mother, who stood at the threshold with her arms crossed, peering at the tiny Ilmyen house.

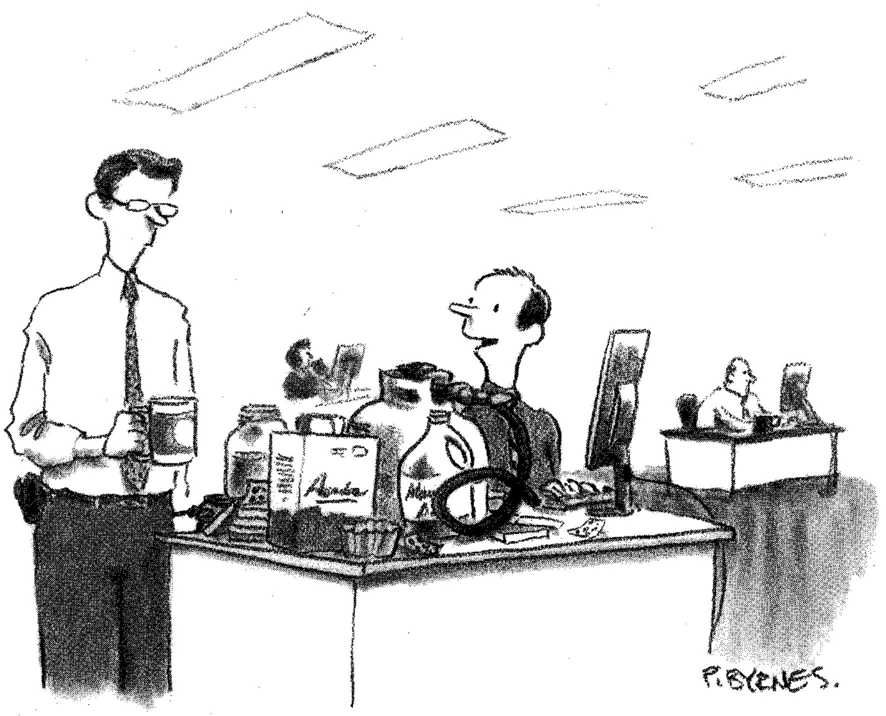
I loved to be at the Ilmyens', where everything seemed exotic and better than at home: their lace curtains were more elegant than the yellowed muslin hanging over our windows, and though I knew that the rain pelted our houses equally, it seemed to me that it fell from their eaves more musically than from ours. Whereas we had only a few books in our house, they had dozens, and in those rare moments of sideways afternoon light the gilt spines of the books glowed and gave off a smell of old leather. In a small cabinet where they kept a special silver candelabra, Mr. Ilmyen's chess medals were mounted on black velour. And this was the other great thing about the Ilmyens: they were all so smart. Many of the chess medals in the case belonged to Mrs. Ilmyen, and a few even belonged to Judite.

Also, the Ilmyens were kind. When Father got so drunk he couldn't stand, it was Mr. Ilmyen who rolled him up in flour sacks and carted him home on his shoulders. "Latvian Jews are very fine people," Father would say on those nights, as he wrapped his arms around his sides and swayed. "Even if they do speak Russian." But in the morning, when his head hurt terribly, he blamed the ache not on the drink but on the way Mr. Ilmyen had dumped him onto our kitchen floor. Then Father would go back to fostering a low-grade dislike of Mr. Ilmyen, which Rudy told me had far more to do with the fact that the minute the Soviets packed up, Mr. Ilmyen had claimed one of the best fishing spots on the river.

Mother unwittingly reinforced my admiration of the Ilmyens. Each night, as Rudy and I climbed into bed, instead of making us say our prayers or kissing us, as other mothers did, she bent over us and breathed, "Rudy, Ada, be geniuses." She said this each night because each morning she had to get up at five-thirty to ride the bus to Riga, where she cleaned houses for people who had more money and more things than we did, and who she assumed had obtained those things through their intelligence. But the smartest people in our town were the Ilmyens. And so it seemed to me that the clearest path toward brilliance, and thus toward parental affection and approval, would be through studying Judite and learning how to think like her. Of course, if I became more Jewish in my heart, if I were to suffer somehow for my pains and thus become slightly more special to God, that would be an added benefit.

To this end, on the nights before big

SEYMOUR CHWAST



"Meth doesn't upset my stomach the way coffee does."

exams I studied with Judite. But, despite my long hours at the Ilmyen home, I was still a long way from brilliance. Judite and I tried to focus on conjugating German verbs, but our talk usually turned to hopeless, tragic things, like the possibility of romance in a small town for a girl with bad skin. When I came home from school one day with another round of poor marks, Mother decided that I was spending too much time looking heavenward and sighing. "I don't want you going over there anymore," she said, hooking her chin toward the Ilmyen house. Over the course of the next few months, however, two things changed her mind: the first was Father's habit of binge drinking while on duty at the cemetery, and the second was the game of chess.

Besides brains, my mother's other great interest was the hall, a little building that sat next to School 42, at the other end of the long road we lived on. Mother's family had donated the stone and paid for the mortar that went into the hall's construction, and it was one of the few buildings that had survived the war. During the occupation, the hall was used to show boring Soviet films like "Orwo," but when the Russians pulled out of Riga it sat empty, and the dull gray cannisters of film gathered dust. This bothered Mother, who believed that the hall should be put to use as often as possible. Each night, she made sure that the key to the front door was hanging from a little hook so that the two Uzbek families who lived on the other side of the school could pray together, and so that on Sundays the two separate congregations of Lutherans could gather. They'd once been a unified congregation but had split when a bitter argument arose over where in the hall to place the piano. The Lutherans who favored having the piano on the left side of the platform now gathered early on Sunday mornings, while the Lutherans who favored having the piano on the right side convened on Sunday evenings. It was Mother's job to move the piano twice each Sunday, which I think went a long way toward explaining her atheist sentiments.

When Father left the cemetery drunk as a Russian three nights in a row and used the little key to let himself into the hall, where he threw up into Mother's beautifully scrubbed toilets, Mother had an epiphany. She began organizing the All-Latvian Ladies' Temperance Society, of which she elected herself president. It was a lonely post, and in the first month of her presidency she managed to persuade only two women to join her society. Mrs. Ivaska, whom we all suspected had Gypsy blood and who would join any organization that gave out coffee with sugar, signed up right away. The other was Mrs. Ilmyen.

Mother, who could be very cosmopolitan when the situation demanded it, realized that with a Gypsy and a Jew as the only other members she would have to change the name from the All-Latvian to the International Ladies' Temperance Society. She had always felt a small, secret admiration for Mrs. Ilmyen, who knew how to put on makeup better than anybody else and who had two nice pairs of shoes. Now that Mrs. Ilmyen had joined the Temperance Society, Mother's admiration grew. And when I mentioned one evening as we boiled our cabbage for dinner that the Ilmyens were chess champions and had even been written up in a Russian chess magazine, not five minutes later we were on their doorstep knocking.

Mr. Ilmyen answered, blinking in surprise. Mother put her hands on my shoulders. "Ada, as you may well already know, is as dumb as a box of rocks, but could you teach her a thing or two about chess?"

Mr. Ilmyen's eyes swam behind his glasses. "Anything is possible," he said, his gaze now on the clouds. And I knew from the way he said those words that everything Judite had taught me about Jewish suffering was true, because it was clear that my mother's request had just increased his suffering exponentially.

One night in mid-March, when Rudy and I were in bed thinking our separate genius thoughts, the phone rang. Another Jewish tragedy, I thought, as Father ran down the hall to the kitchen. "Maris!" he shouted. "You old dog!" This was a high compliment coming from Father, and what he always said when his younger brother called, because Maris called only when he had just got out of one scrape or was heading toward a new one and needed the calming fresh air of the countryside. That is, he needed a place to stay.

All that night, Rudy and I could not stop chattering. We loved it when Uncle Maris came to visit. All he had to do was smile, just wide enough for the gap between his front teeth to show, and Mother could not say no to him. Uncle Maris could put his foot up on the table, smoke indoors, and shave at the kitchen sink if he wanted, because when he smiled the whole world smiled. After he lost his leg in Afghanistan (an event he blamed entirely on the Russian Army, which at the time was in the habit of sending the people least interested in Soviet affairs—Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians—to fight its ugliest wars), Uncle Maris had gained a certain amount of notoriety as a political protester. According to Mother, he had the habit of exhibiting a little too much zeal—even for the protest organizers. But he had a good heart, she said. And with times changing so, this country could use more people like him. After all, she liked to remind us, he was one of the very best vitamin salesmen in all of Riga. How Uncle Maris had become so smart and industrious she didn't know, except that the hard life, Mother sometimes said, looking at her blazing-red hands, had a way of enlightening even the dumbest people.

The next day, a Sunday, we heard a pounding on our front door. "Maris!" Father and Mother cried, their voices climbing the octaves as they opened the door to reveal our uncle, his crutches wedged under his armpits. Where his right leg used to be, two giant suitcases leaned against his remaining knee, like a pair of faithful dogs.

"Don't just stand there like cough drops," Father yelled at us, and Uncle Maris tipped a shoulder in our direction and beamed.

"Ada! What a big girl you are! And Rudy! Look at you—a man already!" He was referring to the mustache, which Rudy had spent a full year growing. Rudy—bright red—grabbed Uncle Maris's suitcases and hurried inside.

Dinner that night was a grand affair. Mother cooked an eel in its own oil along with onions, and for once we did not eat cabbage. And though Mother had been the president of the International Ladies' Temperance Society for four weeks already, she graciously turned a blind eye when Uncle Maris lined up the shot glasses and started pouring Father's bathtub vodka. We toasted the eel—several times, in fact. And with each toast the eel became more magnificent. At last, when the eel was gone, Father, ignoring Mother's frowns, brought out the plum brandy. Father pounded the table with his glass, the signal for a toast, and Uncle Maris raised the bottle. "A story, I'll tell you a story, and, young man"—Uncle Maris pointed the bottle at Rudy—"this is one I want you to take special note of."

"Long ago, there was a secret congress of crows," he said. "At that time, crows were big as cows, and strong. With three powerful strokes of their shiny black wings they could fly from one end of the world to the other. But they were proud, and for this God had to punish them. He scattered them throughout the forests of the world and clipped their wings, so that they couldn't fly properly and had to hop from tree to tree. To make matters worse, God created man and allowed him to multiply. But man couldn't fly—no, he couldn't even hop from tree to tree. So the crow decided to haunt man wherever he went by laughing at his clumsy ways, mocking him with cries and calls."

I nodded my head. I knew that this was why Mother, who had no time for religion, still hung fishbones in the shape of a cross over our back door. A crow, she'd explained, in its heart hates God, and the cross is the only thing that scares a crow off.

Uncle Maris drained his shot glass and leaned forward. "But Latvian crows are the meanest. They are not allowed to caw in Latvian—only in Russian—and this makes them screech all the more in rage."

"A good story," Father pronounced.

"A true story," Uncle Maris corrected, producing a wad of paper from his pocket. "Language is life, you know."

"What's that?" Mother asked.

"This, my dear woman, is a letter of support—a petition—urging the speedy implementation of the Language Law. Our leaders need to hear how thoroughly we Latvians love our language, how completely we want to preserve and protect it. After all, an unspoken language is a dead language." Here Uncle Maris looked at Father. "We will be like dead people." And now he turned his gaze on Mother. "Just think of Ada and Rudy."

Mother shook her head sadly. "You should see Ada's marks in Latvian!"

"But it's not her fault, when Latvian is only spoken half the time in school. This is not right. Why are we still speaking Russian? This is Latvia!" Uncle Maris pounded his crutch on the floor. "How can we know who we are if we don't make a clean break from the Russians?"

"But didn't we do that when we kicked out the Soviets?" Rudy asked.

"No, no." Uncle Maris held his head in his hands and groaned. "That was just the start. We must throw off the yoke of the Russian language. It is strangling us. If people wish to speak Russian, fine—but they should do it in Russia." Uncle Maris waved the letter over his head. "And if the Language Law hurries them on their way, so much the better."

Father pinched the bridge of his nose and Mother tipped her head, considering.

"Times are changing," Uncle Maris continued. "And people either have to change with them or be left behind."

"Oh, absolutely," Father said at last.

I nodded my head in agreement. It all sounded very sensible to me—not that long ago, one of our schoolteachers had been sent to prison for encouraging mothers to speak Latvian behind closed doors. And I could tell by the shine in Rudy's eyes that he was memorizing Uncle Maris's every word and gesture.

That night, Uncle Maris slept on the couch, with his suitcases holding his inventory of vitamins stacked beside him. In the morning, he dressed carefully, shaving at the sink while Rudy and I ate breakfast. Though Rudy's hair was brown, the fuzz above his lip and on his chin had a tinge of red, which did not escape Uncle Maris's notice.

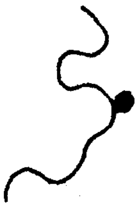
"The importance of a clean, well-kept appearance in a salesman cannot be emphasized enough," he told Rudy, pointing the razor at my brother's mustache. "These days, only foreigners and old Russian Orthodox wear beards and mustaches."

Rudy bobbed his head, vigorously agreeing.

"And red hair—well, it carries a taint," Uncle Maris said. Then he crutched his way into the living room, where he loaded up two smaller suitcases with bottles of vitamins and left for the bus stop. By the time he came home that evening, Rudy had shaved off his beloved mustache.

Uncle Maris stayed with us for a week, and then a week became two weeks. Each morning, he got up just as Mother left for work. He dressed in the dark, carefully pinning to his lapel a red plastic carnation, which, he said, was both a call for unity and a reminder of how much blood had already been spilt for the cause. Then, with his suitcases full of vitamins clutched against the crutch grips, he went to the bus stop, where he rode to neighboring towns. He didn't return until long after Father had locked up the cemetery. It was his strategy, he explained to Rudy, to sell to the towns farthest away, then work his way back, like pulling tight the drawstring of a net. He was good at it, too, often selling an entire suitcase of vitamins in a single day. And he was tireless. When he returned, he stayed up late with Rudy and Father discussing politics, the progress of nationalism, or his plans for a new invention. Although it was top secret, he didn't seem to mind telling us all about the serum he was developing, which was supposed to erase wrinkles by freezing the muscles beneath the skin. Uncle Maris was in a hurry: some Americans were working on a similar serum. "And they sure need it—what ferocious grinners and squinters those Americans are!" he exclaimed.

I kept busy by studying with Judite and playing chess at the Ilmyens' kitchen table. An open chess tournament was to be held at the hall, and everyone was talking about it—even people who didn't care about chess—for nothing quite this exciting had taken place in our town in a long time. Every afternoon, Judite showed me opening moves—the gambit, the king's and queen's Indian defense, the Nimzo-Indian defense—and explained to me again and again the importance of controlling the four key middle squares. Then we practiced checkmates—scholar's mate, the smothered mate, Boden's mate, Anastasia's mate—until Judite was satisfied that I'd be able to hold my own with the other beginners, and maybe even with a few of the intermediate players. One day, just a week before the big tournament, when I'd come to the conclusion that I'd never have a genius moment in my life and that this was my particular suffering, I suddenly discovered that I'd trapped Judite in a smothered mate. She was kind enough to allow me to believe that I had orchestrated this myself. "Well, well," Mr. Ilmyen said, beaming behind his glasses when he saw the board. Later, he patted me on the shoulder as I squeezed past him and through the front door.



When I got home, Mother was doing laundry, so I started dinner. Uncle Maris and Father were sitting on the couch, a half-empty bottle wedged in the cushion between them. They were watching "Crocodile," a Russian pop-shock news program that was filmed from the passenger seat of a car that careered around the streets of St. Petersburg, capturing the day's most cataclysmic or grisly events, most of which were car accidents involving hapless pedestrians knocked clean out of their shoes.

Mother looked in on the men. "You're not getting drunk, are you?" She grinned savagely at Uncle Maris.

"Oh, Dagmara, calm down," Uncle Maris said, and laughed. "Drunks are people, too, you know. Young men get drunk because they don't know who they are; old men get drunk because they do." In each hand Uncle Maris held a bottle of vitamins, and as he spoke he shook the bottles, underscoring each word with a percussive rattle.

"It's time to eat," Mother said, heading for the kitchen.

We all gathered at the table and looked at the food in silence: wilted cabbage, overboiled potatoes, and carrots cooked to exhaustion, leached of color. It was a far cry from eel and onions or Mother's famous pierogi, but it was the best I could do. I tried not to notice how liberally everyone was salting the food, how long it was before anyone broke the silence.

"How are sales?" Rudy turned to Uncle Maris.

"Pah!" Uncle Maris spat a white chunk of carrot onto his plate. "Foreigners! So tight they squeak when they fart. And they're so backward!"

"I beat Judite Ilmyen today in chess," I whispered to Mother, my clumsy attempt to steer the conversation to safer topics.

"Oh, Ada!" Mother said, her eyes shiny.

Uncle Maris tapped his fork on his plate. "So, tell me—who are these Ilmyens?"

"Nobody," Rudy said.

"Neighbors," I said.

"But not Latvian?"

"No," Father answered.

"So why do you go over there so much?" Uncle Maris asked me.

I rolled my eyes heavenward and sighed. "They're God's chosen people, which is to say they are special, which is to say they are expert in the art of suffering. Also, they are very smart."

"Well, if they're so special and smart, why do Mr. Ilmyen's elbows show through his sleeves?" Rudy piped up.

Uncle Maris smiled wide. "Well, scratch a Russian," he said. It was an old saying, so old I couldn't remember how the rest of it went, but the gist of it was that lurking beneath the thin varnish of any ethnic Russian or Russian speaker there were things far worse than mere Russianness.

"They're not Russian," I said at last. "They are Jews who speak Russian."

"Just one more reason they should go," Uncle Maris said. "Jews in particular—inflicting their troubles and woe on everyone else. And the way they go on about it—as if they were the only ones who suffered." Uncle Maris looked at his empty trouser leg.

"Oh, they're all right," Mother said. Later, she made a lot of noise as we did the dishes, washing and rewashing, as if those plates and cups were a difficult problem that she could solve only with her hands.

It was now early April and the light lasted a little longer each day, bringing the birds back to us, one by one. I could detect the hard elemental smell of mud thawing. The soil was breathing again, and in early mornings, when the vapor hung over the fields, Rudy and I collected worms for midnight eel-fishing expeditions. On the Daugava, April is the best month for eel, as the sky never quits weeping and the eels seem to prefer things that way. We wanted to pickle or smoke as many eels as possible, because Uncle Maris loved them, and we hoped that with enough eel on hand he might regain his sense of humor, which had been slowly evaporating since he arrived.

The Language Law would be fully implemented in four weeks, but for some reason, instead of taking solace in this fact, Uncle Maris seemed frantic to secure more signatures of support. I could tell that Mother was edgy, too: she frowned at Maris more and often sniffed in his direction, gauging by his body odor how much he'd drunk that day. We figured that his vitamin sales were down, because one Monday Maris announced that he'd combed the countryside long enough and it was time to sell his wares in our town.

Uncle Maris took Rudy with him—for moral support, he said. Together they rode the bus to the houses beyond School 42, stopping first at the Latvian houses, which—Maris told Rudy and Rudy told me—were easy to spot, because Latvians build their homes as if they were planning to stay, while Ukrainians, Jews, and Gypsies cobble their homes together with whatever they can find, because they're too cheap to bother with appearances. All of which is to say that Uncle Maris wasn't holding out much hope for big sales in our town full of foreigners, but for some reason he felt obligated to try anyway, carefully pinning that red plastic carnation to his lapel and checking and double-checking the signatures on his yellowed petition. With Rudy in tow, Uncle Maris stumped along the back roads, only to be turned away at every Uzbek, Korean, Ukrainian, and Russian household. By the day before the chess tournament, he'd worked his way to our end of the road and decided to pay a visit to the Ilmyens'.

"At least remove that carnation," Father advised. "It has lost a bit of color and acquired a strange odor."

Uncle Maris simply smiled, and then crutched himself double-time across the lane. We all gathered at the open door and watched. As it was Friday evening, the window shades of the Ilmyen house were drawn. Even so, Mr. Ilmyen had the door open before Uncle Maris made it to their front step.

"Good evening, sir." Uncle Maris bowed with a flourish. "I'm Ada's uncle, Maris Kalnins."

"I know who you are." Mr. Ilmyen adjusted his glasses.

"Then, perhaps you'd be interested in the betterment of your body. Vitamins are essential, you know, to good health."

"We don't buy or sell on the Sabbath," Mr. Ilmyen said, politely but firmly.

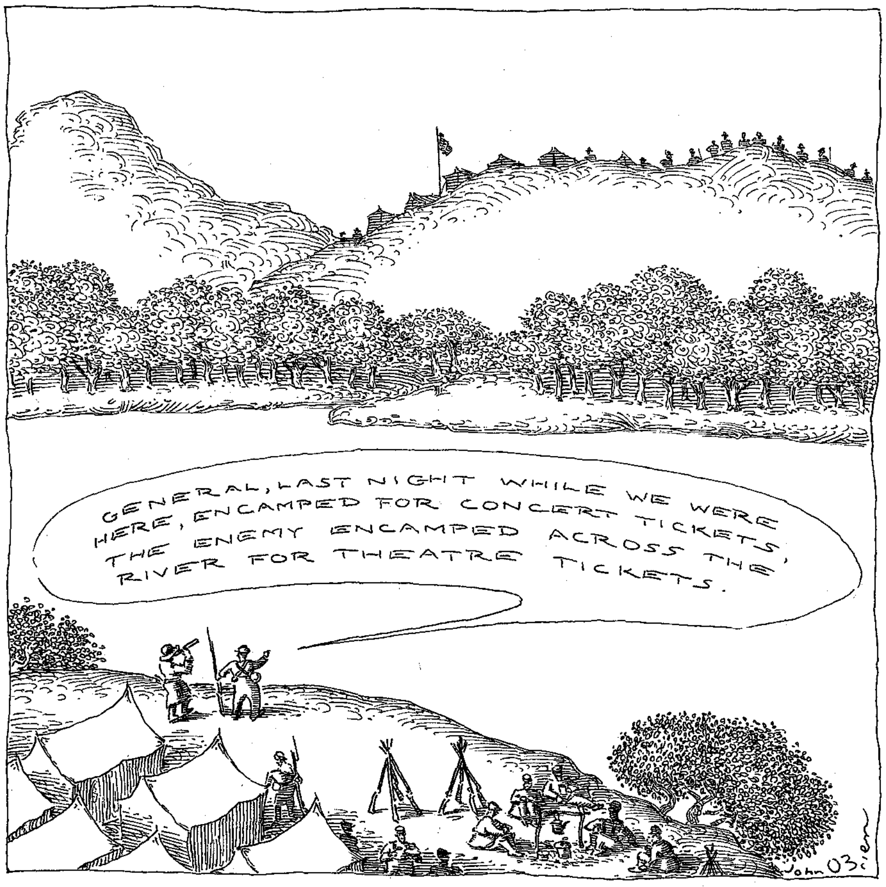
"Well, then, perhaps you'd be interested in promoting the betterment of Latvian culture." Uncle Maris withdrew the petition from his breast pocket and unfolded it. "The Latvian language—and indeed the Latvian way of life—must be kept sacred by those who claim to be Latvian."

Mr. Ilmyen pushed his glasses higher on his nose. "I could not help it that my family was uprooted from their home and railed here. I could not help which languages we carried with us."

Uncle Maris drew himself to his full height. "But language, my good fellow, is identity."

"I couldn't agree with you more," Mr. Ilmyen said quietly, shutting the door on Uncle Maris. Uncle Maris whirled on his crutches. We all jumped from the threshold and became inordinately busy scrubbing dishes or pretending to study. Later that night, no amount of industry or imagination could block the sounds of Uncle Maris swearing at the TV. His talk was so raw, so open, it was like gazing upon someone in his nakedness.

The next day, the rain was all around us, routing deeper grooves into the eaves of the roof. Mother fussed and fumed in the kitchen, preparing a tray of pierogi for the tournament. She was in a hurry to get to the hall and set out the crates that doubled as small chess tables and move the piano to the middle of the platform, so as to maintain a fragile equilibrium between the Lutherans. Since his standoff with Mr. Ilmyen, Uncle Maris hadn't moved from the couch, where he drank steadily and watched "Crocodile" with Father. Father, visibly nostalgic for the days of crazy Cosic and the Iossels, kept looking at the phone. "Nobody's died in weeks," he lamented. "I'm a wreck." But as soon as Mother let herself out the back door Father got a bucket and a flashlight and went into the yard. Rudy followed him, wasting no time in cutting up Mother's good clothesline and churning up her cabbage rows for


GENERAL, LAST NIGHT WHILE WE WERE HERE, ENCAMPED FOR CONCERT TICKETS, THE ENEMY ENCAMPED ACROSS THE RIVER FOR THEATRE TICKETS.
John O'Brien

worms. I changed in and out of three different sweaters and skirts, trying to find the one combination that made me look smarter, until it was time to go.

When I arrived at the hall, Mother had stationed herself in the foyer behind a long table of pastries and the contribution box for the Temperance Society. Nearly everyone in town had turned out for the tournament—our teachers from school, all the neighbors and the fathers and mothers of the student chess players from No. 42. Despite Judite's fine coaching, I was in the beginner group. So I threaded through the crush to the front of the hall, where the other beginners—six- and seven-year-olds, most of them—fidgeted behind the cloth-covered crates. I didn't last long. One of the Uzbek girls in the class ahead of me got me flustered with an Alekhine defense and finished me off quickly. I was grateful that Mother wasn't there to see it. The winners then paired with the intermediates, and thirty minutes later the victors of that round—one of whom was Judite—battled it out for a turn with the local master: Mr. Ilmyen. By the time Judite beat her opponent, everyone had finished eating and settled into chairs, packed like herrings in a barrel.

Mr. Ilmyen shuffled up the steps to the stage and took a seat behind the table reserved for the final match, and Judite followed. Mr. Ilmyen nodded to Mrs. Ilmyen, standing in the back, and the overhead projector hummed and threw the image of a gigantic chessboard against the back wall. With each move Mr. Ilmyen and Judite made, Mrs. Ilmyen moved disks over the glass so we could watch on the wall.

"Ooooh!" the crowd murmured when Judite moved her queen's knight deep into her father's rank of pawns.

"Aaaah!" came the sage reply when Mr. Ilmyen moved his king's pawn forward. For twenty minutes this went on: one clever move after another, each move punctuated by reverent sighs and soft murmurings in Uzbek, Russian, and other sounds from the east. And then, just when it looked as if Judite would pin her father in an Anastasia's mate, Mr. Ilmyen blocked with a rook. They were at a momentary impasse: any move that either one of them could make would result in the sacrifice of an essential piece. The audience held its collective breath.

And then from the foyer came Mother's voice, high and shrill: "For God's sake, go home, you drunken booby!" In burst Uncle Maris, his face beetroot red, his breath ragged, and the plastic carnation heaving up and down as if it had a heart of its own. In his hand he held the petition, which he raised above his head.

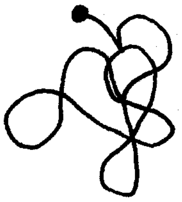
"You don't belong here, you know," Uncle Maris shouted.

"My dear fellow." Mr. Ilmyen picked up a pawn and held it suspended in the air. "This is our home. Where else should we go?"

"Who the hell cares? You're the expert in suffering. Why don't you just go and throw yourself under a train!" Uncle Maris raised his crutch as if it were a javelin, and then he hurled it. The crutch flew through the air and landed with a resounding *twang* in the strings of the open piano. For three horrifying seconds the crowd was silent.

At last Mr. Ilmyen stood, and brushed the front of his trousers. "And now, ladies and gentlemen, I bid you good night," he said in Latvian. It was so sad and sweet—something that people said only in the movies, and then only when they were going away for a very long time. Mr. Ilmyen put his hand on Judite's shoulder, and together they crossed the stage, to where Mrs. Ilmyen held open the small side door. The spell broken, Uncle Maris, minus one crutch, stumped to the foyer and out the front door.

Everyone spluttered and brayed all at once: "He must be crazy!" "Gives the Language Law a bad name." "Well, he has a good point, nonetheless."



I slipped out the back, determined to find Mr. Ilmyen or Judite. But when I got outside only Uncle Maris was there.

"Help me a minute," Uncle Maris said, leaning his weight on me.

More clouds had rolled in from the east, and the sky cracked in two. As we started walking, lightning shot out in arcs and rain pounded the road.

"You probably think I'm a terrible man, saying these things," Uncle Maris said.

I shook my head, but I wasn't really sure. The rain fell with such force that my skirt stuck to my legs and the road dissolved beneath our feet into narrow, violent streams of muddied water. With each step, my shoes filled with mud, and I just wanted to get home. But Uncle Maris's crutch sank deeper into the road, and it seemed as if we would never make it.

"You're ashamed of me. You wish I had never come here," he continued.

"No," I lied, bearing up under his weight. I could see our house in the distance, and I tried to pick up the pace.

"You want to know how I lost my leg?"

"Not really," I said.

"I threw myself over a mine," Uncle Maris continued, undeterred. "I saved the man standing beside me—a Russian, incidentally. Now tell me I'm a terrible man."

"No," I said.

Uncle Maris leaned close. "I always liked you. Rudy, he's O.K., but you're the smart one." He lurched, and for a horrifying second I thought he would kiss me. And then he righted himself with the crutch, doubled over, and retched a colossal amount of liquid onto my shoes.

"I beg your pardon most sincerely," he said, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. I shrugged out of his grip and left him at the edge of our yard, where he retched behind Mother's rosebush. The light was on in the kitchen, and as I came in through the back door Father and Rudy were at the sink. They'd caught a long dark silver eel, a fully matured adult who'd been reckless, who'd made the mistake of biting on a lowly lobworm soaked in pilchard oil. Rudy held the eel on its back and, with a small kitchen knife, cut out its angry eyes.

"Where did you catch that?" I asked, astonished at its size.

Rudy grinned. "Where do you think?"

I realized that while Mr. Ilmyen was at the hall playing chess they had been fishing in his spot. Mother came through the back door then, and in the open frame of sky and darkness I saw Uncle Maris, still in the yard. His mouth was moving and sounds kept issuing forth, a burbling colorless stream of rage.

"He goes. Tomorrow," Mother said. Father tried hard to hide his embarrassment by scrutinizing the eyeless eel.

Then Mother turned and looked at my feet. "Get your other shoes and coat on. We're going to the Ilmyens'."

When we got there, Mother stood on the step and wrung her hands. We could hear dogs howling in the hills. Finally, she knocked on the door, and a few seconds later Mr. Ilmyen appeared. Mother touched the white temperance pin on her coat. "Mr. Ilmyen, you must forgive my brother-in-law. He's an idiot, and he drinks too much. And when he drinks he talks, and when he talks, unfortunately, he says stupid things."

Mr. Ilmyen stared at us, and then lifted his gaze to a point above our heads. Mrs. Ilmyen's voice floated out from somewhere deep in the kitchen. "Go away. Please," she said. So simple a request, so complete. We turned and trudged back to our kitchen. My heart sat heavy in my chest, the blood in it tired and unmoving. I will not pretend that I understood the vast and irreparable damage that had occurred in the course of the evening. But I had lost Judite, that much I knew. It occurred to me that at last I was feeling just a fraction of that suffering that Judite had tried so hard to teach me about. And then I thought what an idiot I was to think so.

Later, Mother sat on the edge of my bed, the springs creaking under her weight. I did not want to be a genius and I did not want her wishing me to be one. Though it was dark inside the room, a break in the clouds revealed a slip of moonlight that transformed the window into a box of silver. I could see then that Mother was looking at her hands. "Don't cry, Ada," she said. "Nothing lasts forever."

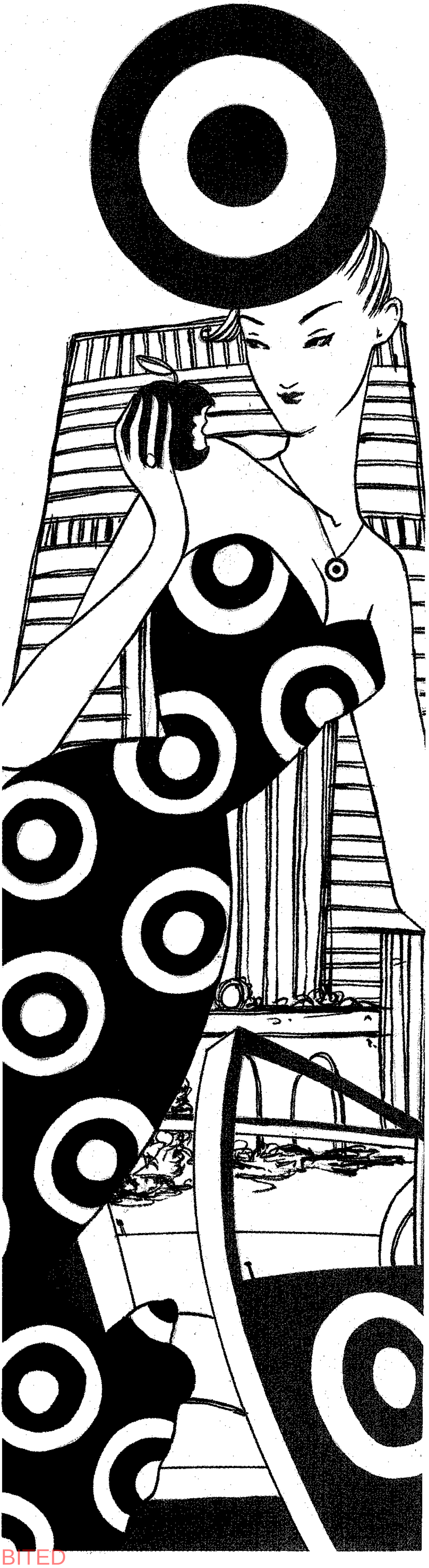
By the time we woke the next morning, Uncle Maris was gone. According to the note he left next to the sink, he felt like a fox caught unawares by winter and forced to eat its own turds. He would return only when we had all come to our senses, and maybe not even then.

"Well, that's that." Mother rubbed one chapped hand against the other. Then she looked at the wall clock and gasped, "Shit! The Lutherans! Hurry!" She grabbed her coat, and I followed her out the back door and down the road, past the Ilmyens' house, where the shades were drawn, to the hall. We had forty minutes before the left-side Lutherans were due, and inside the hall the previous evening's disaster remained untouched: there were chairs overturned, chessmen scattered on the floor, and plates of half-eaten pastry and plastic cups of stale coffee studding the windowsills. Uncle Maris's crutch was still wedged in the open piano. Mother dragged a trash bin from the foyer, and I climbed onto the platform. After removing the crutch, I leaned my shoulder into the piano and pushed with all my might. And that was my mistake: the piano sailed over the lip of the platform, and its legs snapped on impact with the floor. The resounding crash set the crows to screeching and the dogs to barking in the lane.

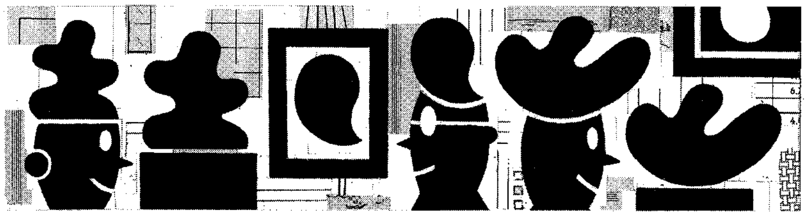
Mother surveyed the destruction, her hands on her hips. At last, she turned to me and said, "I've never cared for stringed instruments, if you want to know the truth."

We left the hall just as we'd found it, only now with the added catastrophe of the wrecked piano. "Maybe the mutual loss will bring the Lutherans together," Mother mumbled, and I knew that as much as she loved her hall she'd had enough. As our feet churned through the mud, I thought of Uncle Maris and how he'd split in my mind into two separate people: the Uncle Maris of my childhood, whom I would always love, and the Uncle Maris I never wanted to see again. He had changed, these last months, and I realized that there was no stopping that or helping him. But that was how life works, Father sometimes said. People and things had to run their own course, regardless of our wishes or opinions. And Father was right: the rain was falling as steadily as ever and the river had flooded the cemetery, as it always does this time of year. Already the suggestion of a few hairs had reappeared on Rudy's upper lip.

We came to the Ilmyen home. Mother charged ahead, but I let my feet drag a little. I told myself that I saw a slight movement at the edge of the shade. I told myself that it was Judite and that at school tomorrow we would not avoid each other, would not hide behind our hair and thick silences. I told myself that the black phone in the kitchen would ring again, and that for some of us, at least, life would return to normal. ♦



THE CRITICS


GUY DELISLE

BOOKS

KIMWORLD

Inside the North Korean slave state.

BY IAN BURUMA

The charm of dictators has been known to reduce the hardest men to jelly. I remember a tough-minded Japanese photographer returning from Pyongyang in the nineteen-seventies still aglow from the experience of Kim Il Sung's "warm handshake." Similar reports have come from some of those allowed into Hitler's mesmerizing presence: warm handshakes and piercing eyes appear to go with the position.

Bradley K. Martin, whose "Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty" (St. Martin's; $29.95) is the heaviest tome to appear in English on the subject, has spent decades penetrating the mysteries of North Korea. He paints a grim picture in exhaustive detail, backed by many first-person accounts. But, though he is no apologist, he is perhaps fair to a fault. "There might be two sides to the story," he cautions. Kim Il Sung possessed "considerable personal charm that only increased with age and experience." The same goes for his son: "I would describe him as an often insensitive and brutal despot who had another side that was generous and—increasingly as he matured—charming."

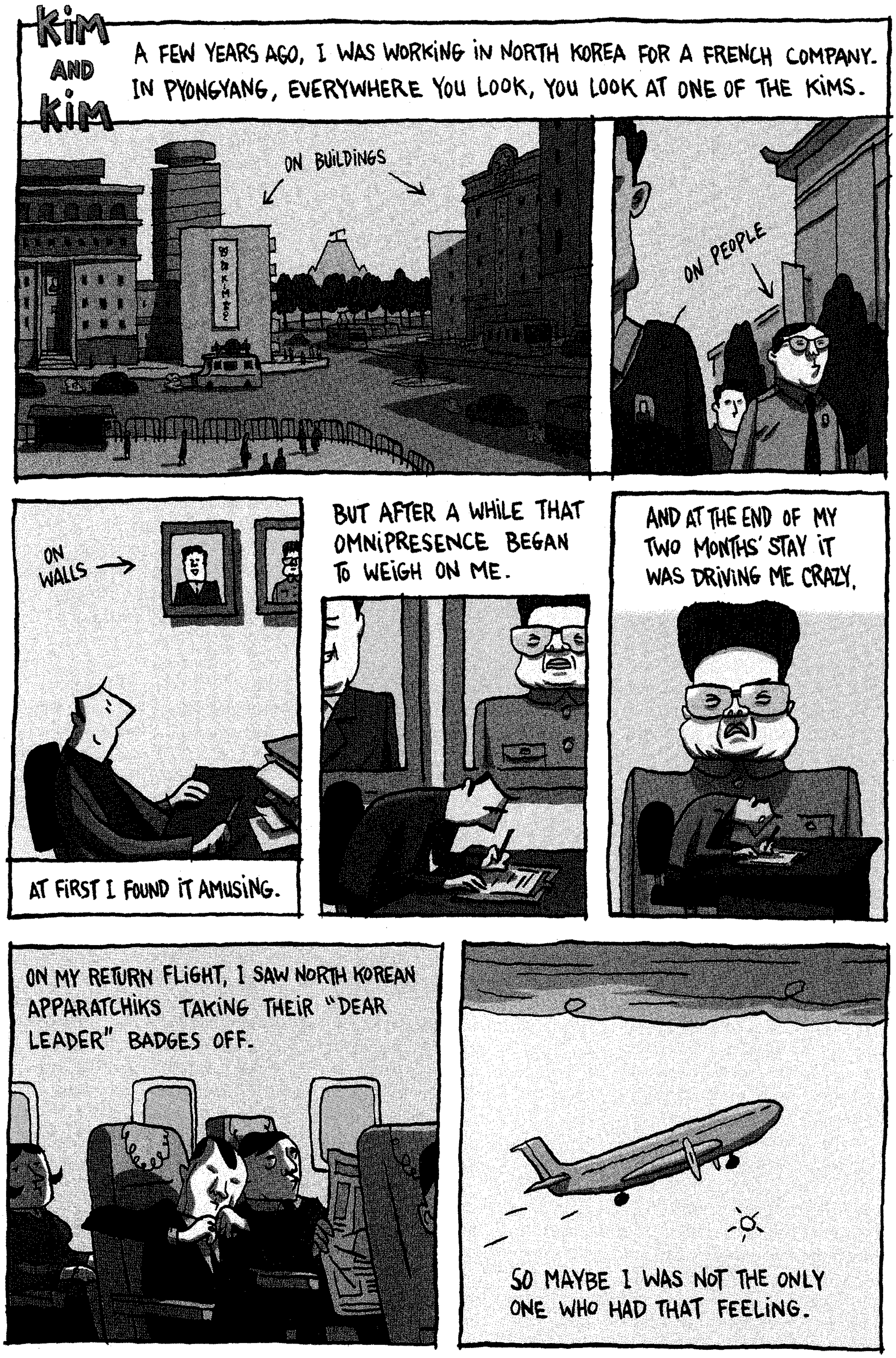
Since North Korea is such an isolated and secretive place—the Bhutan of Stalinism—hard facts are not easy to come by. But we know a few things. To begin with, Kim Il Sung, whom the Soviets installed as head of state in 1945, was responsible for starting the Korean War, which may have caused as many as a million civilian deaths. In addition to the toll exacted in the North by American bombing raids, many civilians were massacred by the Communists for ideological reasons. After the Korean War ended in the ruin of his country, Kim Il Sung, to deflect the blame, had tens of thousands of people purged, sending many to prison or hard-labor camps. Christians and Buddhists who had not already fled to the South were persecuted in large numbers, and many were killed. To cleanse his own ranks of possible rivals, Kim had many of his most intimate and loyal associates arrested and tortured. As Jasper Becker notes in "Rogue Regime: Kim Jong Il and the Looming Threat of North Korea" (Oxford; $28), four hundred and fifty thousand out of six hundred thousand Party members were investigated and punished for "violating Party rules." The Great Leader's policy, to be memorized by prison guards, was that anyone who opposed, or could conceivably be opposed to, Kim's absolute rule would be singled out for "eradication."

By the time Kim Jong Il, the Dear Leader, took over from his father as the absolute ruler of North Korea, the country was a slave society, where only the most trusted caste of people were allowed to live in sullen obedience in Pyongyang, while vast numbers of potential class enemies were worked to death in mines and hard-labor camps. After Kim Il Sung's death, in 1994, the regime suspended executions for a month, and throughout the following year it committed relatively few killings. Since this was at the height of a famine, largely brought on by disastrous agricultural policies, hundreds of thousands were already dying from hunger. Then word spread that Kim Jong Il wished to "hear the sound of gunshots again." Starving people were shot for stealing a couple of eggs.

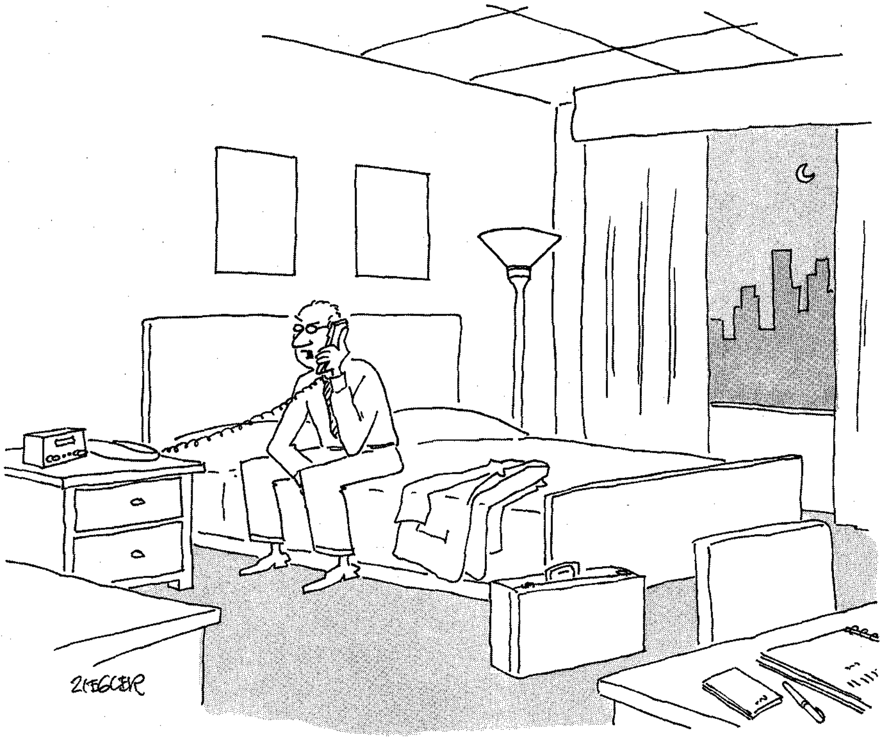
North Korea in the nineteen-nineties was, in Martin's somewhat peculiar choice of phrase, "a nightmare by human-rights standards." Farmers were not allowed to relieve their hunger by growing their own food and selling it, for, Kim observed, "Telling people to solve the food problems on their own only increases the number of farmers markets and peddlers. In addition, this creates egoism among people, and the basis of the Party's class may come to collapse." If things were bad in "normal" life, the conditions in the vast North Korean gulag are difficult to imagine. Even here Martin's struggles for "balance" come across as slightly otiose: "While more and more inmates died as a result of malnutrition, the political prison camps continued to be run more as slave-labor and slow death camps than as instant death camps. It may seem a small distinction, but it shows that in this regard at least Kim Jong Il was no Hitler."

Jasper Becker is less inclined to make these fine distinctions. As a result, his book, though much slighter and less detailed than Martin's, is the more intelligent. Becker wrote the classic book "Hungry Ghosts," about Mao Zedong's man-made famine in China, and has interviewed many Korean refugees who managed to stumble across the Chinese border. The highest-ranking defector from the North was a man named Hwang Jang-yop, Kim Il Sung's chief ideologue, and both Martin and Becker rely heavily on his accounts. According to Hwang, about a million people starved to death in 1996 alone.

Kim Jong Il, meanwhile, was ferried about in his fleet of Mercedes-Benzes, from one grand palace to another, where Chinese, Japanese, French, Russian, and Korean food was always available for feasts that sometimes went on for days. One of the more mouthwatering accounts of life in Kim's court is by his former Japanese chef, a man who later took on the pseudonym Kenji Fujimoto, whose duties included special trips to


KIM AND KIM
A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS WORKING IN NORTH KOREA FOR A FRENCH COMPANY. IN PYONGYANG, EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, YOU LOOK AT ONE OF THE KIMS.
ON BUILDINGS
ON PEOPLE
ON WALLS
AT FIRST I FOUND IT AMUSING.
BUT AFTER A WHILE THAT OMNIPRESENCE BEGAN TO WEIGH ON ME.
AND AT THE END OF MY TWO MONTHS' STAY IT WAS DRIVING ME CRAZY.
ON MY RETURN FLIGHT, I SAW NORTH KOREAN APPARATCHIKS TAKING THEIR "DEAR LEADER" BADGES OFF.
SO MAYBE I WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO HAD THAT FEELING.

DELISLE 2005



"Yes, yes, yes, I miss you, too, honey. Now put the dog on."

• •

Iran to buy caviar, to Denmark for bacon, to Japan for the best cuts of tuna. We know from Fujimoto's book, "Kim Jong Il's Cook—I Saw His Naked Body," that Kim was an avid consumer of fine French wines and Hennessy X.O cognac.

Kim Jong Il's other needs were met by large numbers of carefully selected young women, assigned to their special tasks. There were masseuses and girls trained to cater to the Leader's specific sexual demands, and there were singers and dancers. ("Eat your heart out, Hugh Hefner," is Martin's oddly jocular interjection.) On one occasion, according to Hwang, Kim punished his guests, all high Party officials, for not applauding enough after a dance performance. On another, recounted by the Japanese chef, he ordered the girls to strip naked and dance with his guests. Anyone who dared touch one of Kim's private dancers, however, would be regarded as a thief. According to Hwang, one of Kim's secretaries went home after a night of drinking and told his wife about the Dear Leader's debauchery. She wrote an earnest letter to Kim's father, asking how a man who led such an immoral life could safeguard the happiness of his people. She was arrested and led to a palace where Kim Jong Il was carousing. Kim ordered her to be killed as a counter-revolutionary, but as a special favor allowed her husband to shoot her on the spot.

Even if we follow Martin's advice and refrain from demonizing the Kims, we might be excused for dismissing their moments of charm as an irrelevance. Martin's notion that "people could still muster loyalty for the elder Kim" because "he came across as an engaging figure" is politically naïve. A warm handshake will not explain why an entire people submitted to his whims.

All tyrants are alike, no doubt, but tyranny comes in different forms, and the North Korean variety is an extraordinarily vicious blend of Western and East Asian influences. On such matters, Martin provides far more detail, including long transcripts of interviews with refugees and defectors, but, again, Becker is more incisive. The political component, a mixture of Stalinism and strict neo-Confucianism (with its stress on obedience to authority), is perhaps less complicated than the religious aspects. The Kims' behavior recalls that of such Roman despots as Nero and Caligula, who revelled in their power. In Pyongyang, this often involves a sinister form of practical joking: turning top officials against one another and watching the results on hidden television monitors; or taking other men's wives as mistresses and, when finished with them, forcing the women to remarry men picked on a whim. As Auden ventured in a discussion of Iago, practical joking is always a way of playing God.

The religious cult around the Kims goes further, however; they really are worshipped as divinities, in a peculiarly Korean mixture of native animism and pseudo-Christianity. Martin writes about the Party congress of 1980, when Kim Jong Il, then still the young dauphin, was elected to the five-person presidium of the politburo. The Party newspaper, in a pre-Christmas editorial, offered the Kims as a replacement for the Father and Son in the Holy Trinity. "People of the world, if you are looking for miracles, come to Korea!" it went on. "Christians, do not go to Jerusalem. Come rather to Korea! Do not believe in God. Believe in the great man." After the son's ascent to the presidium, the newspaper reported, there was "an explosion of our people's joy, looking up at the star of guidance shining together with the benevolent sun."

Even though Kim Il Sung had stamped out all independent religious activity in North Korea, the Christian influence is visible in the Kim cult. Apart from the Philippines, Korea has long been the most Christianized country in Asia. In the South, about thirty per cent still belong to various Christian denominations, not including all the followers of pseudo-Christian evangelists, of whom there is a rich variety. Unlike Filipinos, however, the Koreans were originally converted not by Western conquerors but by missionaries, many of whom were Korean themselves. The attraction of Christianity may have been partly political, a means of resisting both the Korean gentry and alien oppressors, especially the Japanese, who ruled Korea between 1910 and 1945. Like the Poles and the Irish, many Koreans believed that the church would help deliver their country from foreign domination.

A model for this mixture of nationalism, social protest, and Christianity was the Taiping Rebellion, in mid-nineteenth-century China. A young scholar named Hong Xiuquan believed that he was Christ's younger brother, whose God-given mission was to destroy the demonic Manchu rulers and establish a heavenly kingdom on earth. His failure, after fourteen years of struggle, cost more than twenty million lives. In Korea, at about the same time, the Eastern Learning (Donghak) school was founded by a Korean mystic named Choe Che-u, who believed he had received divine instruction to deliver the world from evil; his followers rebelled against the government, and later against "Japanese dwarfs and Western barbarians." This uprising, too, ended in a costly defeat, but the vision of Korea as the cradle of a new utopia remained.

Kim Il Sung, the son of pious Christians, was a great admirer of the Eastern Learning school. Like Hong Xiuquan, Choe Che-u, and, indeed, Chairman Mao, Kim Il Sung wanted to be seen as a messiah and not just a Stalinist dictator. Becker convincingly places the Kim cult in a Sino-Korean tradition of millenarian priest-kings, autocratic sages, and holy saviors. It's a tradition in which the source of power is also the source of virtue, spiritual wisdom, and truth—hence the total intolerance of any heterodoxy or dissent. The same idea prevails, in a milder form, in South Korean, and Japanese, corporate life, where workers must learn the "philosophies" of their company founders. It has also spawned such cults as the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

Animism is perhaps an even more important ingredient than Christianity in the spiritual and ideological mélange of Kim worship. Kim Jong Il was born in 1941 or 1942 in Siberia, where his father served in the Soviet Army. But the myth is very different: in North Korea's official histories he was born in a log cabin on Mt. Paektu, the country's most sacred mountain, the place where the Korean people's divine ancestor, the son of a sky god and a bear, was born, more than four thousand years ago. Kim Jong Il, the reincarnation of the divine bear-man, as it were, could not have come into this world on a more auspicious spot. Before his sacred birth, a double rainbow was seen, and the sky was lit up by a shining star.

Myths and legends are scarcely unique to North Korean politics. What makes the Kim cult especially disturbing—but also appealing to many Korean nationalists, even some of those living in the South—is its xenophobia. Koreans, having endured centuries of foreign domination, often use two phrases to describe their "national character": *han*, impotent rage that can be relieved only by collective action, and *sadaechuŭi*, the habit of pandering to foreigners. The Korean élites have tended to fall into warring factions, often allied to different foreign powers. To cover up the fact that Kim Il Sung served in both Chinese and Soviet armies during the Second World War, and was put in charge of North Korea by his Soviet minders, the Kim cult is quick to denounce its enemies, especially in South Korea, as "flunkies." And *han*—directed at Americans, Japanese, and South Koreans, as well as all "class enemies" or "factionalists" at home—is the abiding sentiment in North Korean propaganda.

Kim Il Sung's most famous motto, *juche*—self-reliance—must be understood in this light. *Juche* is an often paranoid fear of dependence on others. The fact that North Korea was highly dependent on stronger Communist powers had to be obscured. The combination of proud isolationism, as an official attitude, with de-facto reliance on China and the Soviet Union has proved disastrous, not least for the North Korean economy, which has been in a state of collapse since the demise of the latter and the capitalist course set by the former. North Korea cannot survive on its own, but it cannot open up, either.

And yet there are people for whom the North Korean regime has not entirely lost its prestige. One can forgive those romantic radicals in the South for admiring the idea of Korean self-reliance, even if it was based on a fiction. Harder to excuse are the nostalgic members of failed Eastern European and Third World utopias who have made pilgrimages to Pyongyang to relive the good old days. When I visited the city in 1996, I saw a group of plump East Germans being picked up by great black limousines that were driven right

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onto the station platform so that they wouldn't get their shoes dusty.

There is also the residue of old socialist dreaming. Bradley Martin quotes a British visitor named Andrew Holloway, who found the "secure and cheerful existence and the comradeship" of the "average" citizen "moving to behold." Despite having written a long book cataloguing torture, famine, and mass murder, Martin approvingly notes that readers of Holloway's account "not consumed with knee-jerk loathing for socialism might be hard-pressed to adjudge as evil beyond redemption a society so apparently successful in inculcating values such as kindness and modesty." My own impression, reinforced by Martin's book, is that North Koreans behave pretty much like all people forced to fight for bare survival: kindness is a dangerous luxury. Far from inculcating gentle behavior, the regime rewards brutality and crushes decency. Anyone caught trying to help a "class enemy," after all, is liable to disappear into the camps.

What to do about Kim Jong Il and his murderous regime? Direct military confrontation is not an appealing option. Kim, although bound to lose a war against better-fed, better-led, and better-equipped American and South Korean troops, has enough artillery, missiles, chemical weapons, and, quite possibly, nuclear bombs to carry out the threat of turning the South Korean capital, Seoul, into a "sea of flames." He has up to a million men in uniform, a dozen chemical-weapons factories, and about a hundred thousand special-operations forces ready to be unleashed. Nor is he likely to get rid of these weapons, for the threat of mass killing is all that he has to bargain with, and is probably the only means of insuring his personal survival. Richard Perle, quoted in Becker's book, maintains that the threat of U.S. military force will push the Chinese to "bring the North Koreans to heel." It's true that China supplies the state with most of its fuel and food. But it benefits from having a Communist buffer state, and fears the consequences of North Korea's collapse—not least a stampede of refugees. Indeed, in the two years since the regime served notice of its nuclear-weapons program, trade between China and Korea has doubled, to $1.4 billion.

The usual alternative to military action is "engagement." This was the favored tactic of the Clinton Administration and of South Korea's last two Presidents, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. During the eighties, South Korea's expanding and increasingly prosperous middle class had broken the back of military authoritarianism. Kim Dae-jung, a longtime dissident, was a key figure in this democratic transformation, and he might have hoped to achieve the same in the North. His so-called Sunshine Policy was designed to winkle the North out of its failed autarky by offering business opportunities, a railway link, and large amounts of cash. Kim Jong Il himself pocketed a secret gift of five hundred million dollars from the Hyundai corporation just before agreeing to grant Kim Dae-jung an audience in Pyongyang. (Hyundai was allowed to build a fortified holiday resort just across the border for South Korean tourists, who are prevented from meeting any locals.) Much else was promised at the meeting of the two Kims in 2000; little so far has materialized. But then the South Koreans, like the Chinese, are essentially committed to sustaining and stabilizing their neighbor; they fear the chaos and the expense if the North should implode (let alone explode). Accordingly, Seoul dramatically increased its trade with the North this year, even after diplomatic talks with Kim Jong Il faltered. In one recent poll, forty per cent of South Koreans named the United States as the country that posed the biggest threat to them; only a third named North Korea.

Meanwhile, there are enough carpetbaggers around the Korean Peninsula to encourage this notion of capitalist seduction. Among the more striking suggestions is one from Jean-Jacques Grauhar, the secretary-general of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in Seoul, who urged Club Med to open a resort in North Korea. He told Martin that changing the system "shouldn't be the objective of foreign investors." The objective, it would seem, is to make money out of vacationing foreigners while Koreans starve.

The problem with trade-and-aid engagement is that North Korea has no middle class to speak of and Kim Jong Il has no reason to allow one to emerge; genuine economic reforms are not in his interest. His people may be dying fast, but, as long as his troops are fed, Kim's absolute power is assured. Becker's assessment is both blunt and hard to dispute: "The past 15 years show that real change can come only when Kim Jong Il and his family are recognized as evil tyrants, removed from power, and put on trial." But how? Neither Becker nor Martin has an entirely plausible solution. Martin ends his book with a bizarre open letter to the Dear Leader, in which, after wishing him all the best, he advises him to hand the country over to "competent and trusted officials," turn his rule into a monarchy, retire to the South of France or to Hollywood, and thus insure that the Kim dynasty will continue, "perhaps even for thousands of years." This does not strike me as a useful contribution.

Becker, undistracted by the charms of tyrants or the cheerful comradeship of their subjects, adopts a more serious tone. He argues that the world must agree about "benchmarks for identifying a rogue state's behaviour just as there is a definition of the crime of genocide." Then, with the right "political will, the world could quickly agree on remedies to disarm a criminal state clearly unable to feed its own population." But who is "the world"? The United Nations? And what remedies would this world have at its disposal? Dealing with Kim Jong Il is like negotiating with a man who holds millions of hostages. One has to be flexible and opportunistic, and use every means at hand, from seduction to the threat of violent force. What the Kims have done to their country is so appalling, though, that almost anything is better than its continuation. The challenge is to bring Kim down without taking millions with him. ♦

LIFE IN CANADA
From the Toronto National Post.

Crown attorneys wanted the court to brand Balliram a dangerous offender, but Mr. Brodsky argued that any form of sentencing would violate his client's right to fundamental justice guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Freedoms.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

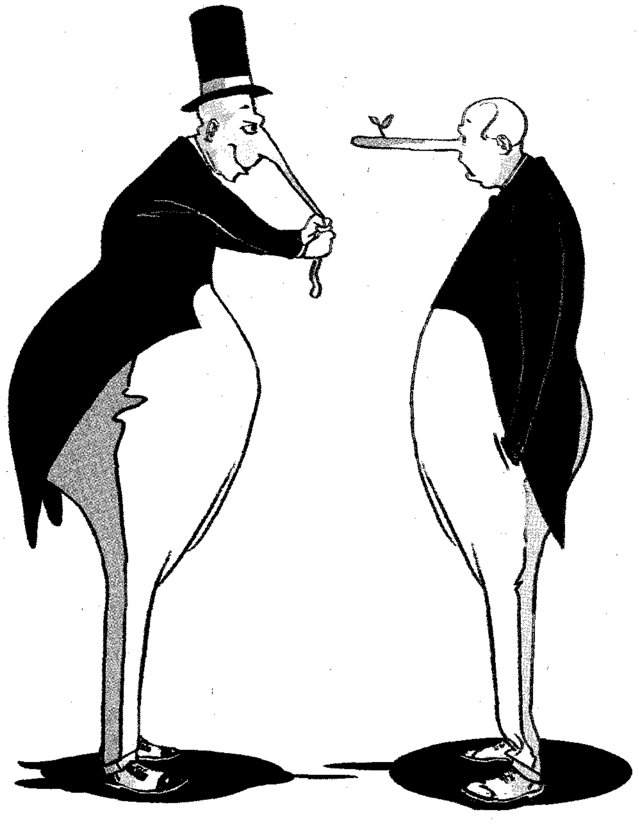
SAY ANYTHING

Three books find truth under cultural and conceptual assault.

BY JIM HOLT

People have been talking bull, denying that they were talking bull, and accusing others of talking bull for ages. "Dumbe Speaker! that's a Bull," a character in a seventeenth-century English play says. "It is no Bull, to speak of a common Peace, in the place of War," a statesman from the same era declares. The word "bull," used to characterize discourse, is of uncertain origin. One venerable conjecture was that it began as a contemptuous reference to papal edicts known as bulls (from the bulla, or seal, appended to the document). Another linked it to the famously nonsensical Obadiah Bull, an Irish lawyer in London during the reign of Henry VII. It was only in the twentieth century that the use of "bull" to mean pretentious, deceitful, jejune language became semantically attached to the male of the bovine species—or, more particularly, to the excrement therefrom. Today, it is generally, albeit erroneously, thought to have arisen as a euphemistic shortening of "bullshit," a term that came into currency, dictionaries tell us, around 1915.

If "bullshit," as opposed to "bull," is a distinctively modern linguistic innovation, that could have something to do with other distinctively modern things, like advertising, public relations, political propaganda, and schools of education. "One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit," Harry G. Frankfurt, a distinguished moral philosopher who is professor emeritus at Princeton, says. The ubiquity of bullshit, he notes, is something that we have come to take for granted. Most of us are pretty confident of our ability to detect it, so we may not regard it as being all that harmful. We tend to take a more benign view of someone caught bullshitting than of someone caught lying. ("Never tell a lie when you can bullshit your way through," a father counsels his son in an Eric Ambler novel.) All of this worries Frankfurt. We cannot really know the effect that bullshit has on us, he thinks, until we have a clearer understanding of what it is. That is why we need a theory of bullshit.



Are bullshitters, indifferent to the truth, worse than liars?

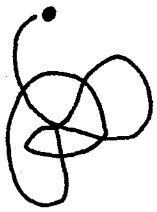
ISTVAN BANYAI

Frankfurt's own effort along these lines was contained in a paper that he presented two decades ago at a faculty seminar at Yale. Later, that paper appeared in a journal, and then in a collection of Frankfurt's writings; all the while, photocopies of it passed from fan to fan. Earlier this year, it was published as "On Bullshit" (Princeton; $9.95), a tiny book of sixty-seven spaciously printed pages that has gone on to become an improbable best-seller.

Philosophers have a vocational bent for trying to divine the essences of things that most people never suspected had an essence, and bullshit is a case in point. Could there really be some property that all instances of bullshit possess and all non-instances lack? The question might sound ludicrous, but it is, at least in form, no different from one that philosophers ask about truth. Among the most divisive issues in philosophy today is whether there is anything important to be said about the essential nature of truth. Bullshit, by contrast, might seem to be a mere bagatelle. Yet there are parallels between the two which lead to the same perplexities.

Where do you start if you are an academic philosopher in search of the quiddity of bullshit? "So far as I am aware," Frankfurt dryly observes, "very little work has been done on this subject." He did find an earlier philosopher's attempt to analyze a similar concept under a more genteel name: humbug. Humbug, that philosopher decided, was a pretentious bit of misrepresentation that fell short of lying. (A politician talking about the importance of his religious faith comes to mind.) Frankfurt was not entirely happy with this definition. The difference between lies and bullshit, it seemed to him, was more than a matter of degree. To push the analysis in a new direction, he considers a rather peculiar anecdote about the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. It was the nineteen-thirties, and Wittgenstein had gone to the hospital to visit a friend whose tonsils had just been taken out. She croaked to Wittgenstein, "I feel just like a dog that has been run over." Wittgenstein (the friend recalled) was disgusted to hear her say this. "You don't know what a dog that has been run over feels like," he snapped. Of course, Wittgenstein might simply have been joking. But Frankfurt suspects that his severity was real, not feigned. This was, after all, a man who devoted his life to combatting what he considered to be pernicious forms of nonsense. What Wittgenstein found offensive in his friend's simile, Frankfurt guesses, was its mindlessness: "Her fault is not that she fails to get things right, but that she is not even trying."

The essence of bullshit, Frankfurt decides, is that it is produced without any concern for the truth. Bullshit needn't be false: "The bullshitter is faking things. But this does not mean that he necessarily gets them wrong." The bullshitter's fakery consists not in misrepresenting a state of affairs but in concealing his own indifference to the truth of what he says. The liar, by contrast, is concerned with the truth, in a perverse sort of fashion: he wants to lead us away from it. As Frankfurt sees it, the liar and the truthteller are playing on opposite sides of the same game, a game defined by the authority of truth. The bullshitter opts out of this game altogether. Unlike the liar and the truthteller, he is not guided in what he says by his beliefs about the way things are. And that, Frankfurt says, is what makes bullshit so dangerous: it unfits a person for telling the truth.



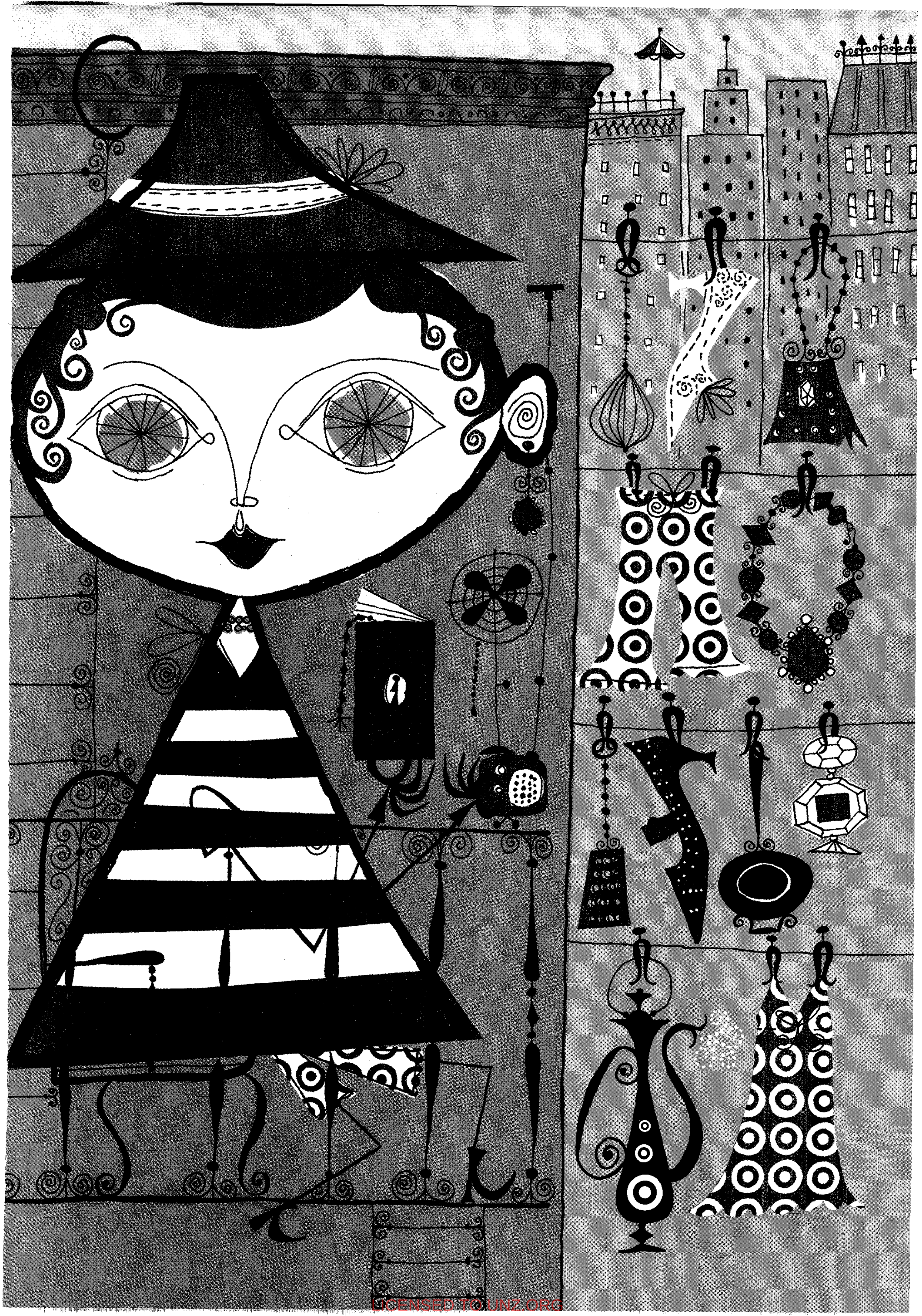
Frankfurt's account of bullshit is doubly remarkable. Not only does he define it in a novel way that distinguishes it from lying; he also uses this definition to establish a powerful claim: "Bullshit is a greater enemy of truth than lies are." If this is true, we ought to be tougher on someone caught bullshitting than we are on someone caught lying. Unlike the bullshitter, the liar at least cares about the truth. But isn't this account a little too flattering to the liar? In theory, of course, there could be liars who are motivated by sheer love of deception. This type was identified by St. Augustine in his treatise "On Lying." Someone who tells a lie as a means to some other goal tells it "unwillingly," Augustine says. The pure liar, by contrast, "takes delight in lying, rejoicing in the falsehood itself." But such liars are exceedingly rare, as Frankfurt concedes. Not even Iago had that purity of heart. Ordinary tellers of lies simply aren't principled adversaries of the truth. Suppose an unscrupulous used-car salesman is showing you a car. He tells you that it was owned by a little old lady who drove it only on Sundays. The engine's in great shape, he says, and it runs beautifully. Now, if he knows all this to be false, he's a liar. But is his goal to get you to believe the opposite of the truth? No, it's to get you to buy the car. If the things he was saying happened to be true, he'd still say them. He'd say them even if he had no idea who the car's previous owner was or what condition the engine was in.

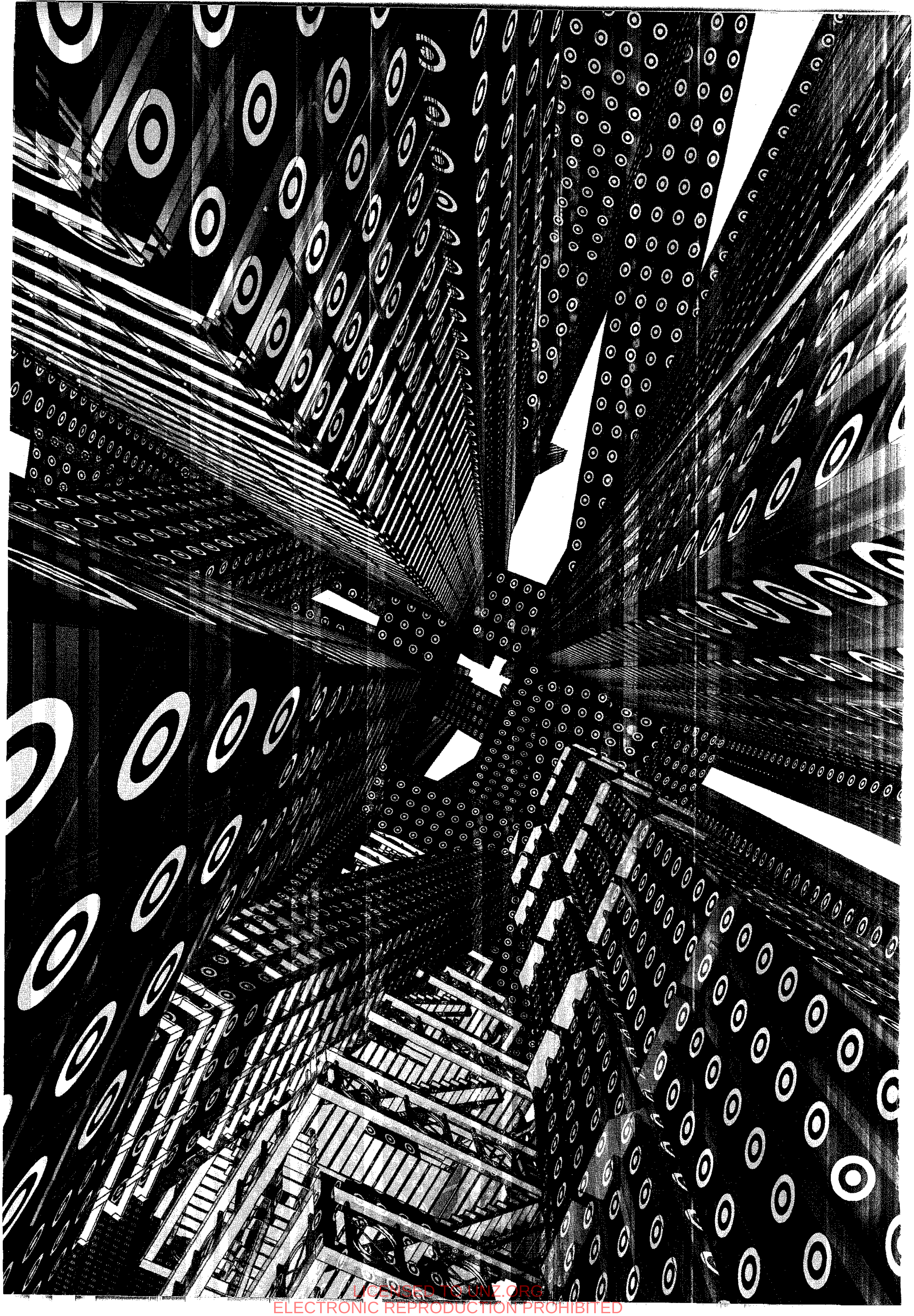
Frankfurt would say that this used-car salesman is a liar only by accident. Even if he happens to know the truth, he decides what he's going to say without caring what it is. But then surely almost every liar is, at heart, a bullshitter. Both the liar and the bullshitter typically have a goal. It may be to sell a product, to get votes, to keep a spouse from walking out of a marriage in the wake of embarrassing revelations, to make someone feel good about himself, to mislead Nazis who are looking for Jews. The alliance the liar strikes with untruth is one of convenience, to be abandoned the moment it ceases to serve this goal.

The porousness of Frankfurt's theoretical boundary between lies and bullshit is apparent in Laura Penny's "Your Call Is Important to Us: The Truth About Bullshit" (Crown; $21.95). The author, a young Canadian college teacher and former union organizer, begins by saluting Frankfurt's "subtle and useful" distinction: "The liar still cares about the truth. The bullshitter is unburdened by such concerns." She then proceeds to apply the term "bullshit" to every kind of trickery by which powerful, moneyed interests attempt to gull the public. "Most of what passes for news," Penny submits, "is bullshit"; so is the language employed by lawyers and insurance men; so is the use of rock songs in ads. She even stretches the rubric to apply to things as well as to words: "The new product that will change your life is probably just more cheap, plastic bullshit," she writes. At times, despite her nod to Frankfurt, Penny appears to equate bullshit with deliberate deceit: "Never in the history of mankind have so many people uttered statements they know to be untrue." But then she says that George W. Bush ("a world-historical bullshitter") and his circle "distinguish themselves by believing their own bullshit," which suggests that they themselves are deluded.

Frankfurt concedes that in popular usage "bullshit" is employed as a "generic term of abuse, with no very specific literal meaning." What he wanted to do, he says, was to get to the essence of the thing in question. But does bullshit have a single essence? In a paper published a few years ago, "Deeper Into Bullshit," G. A. Cohen, a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, protested that Frankfurt excludes an entire category of bullshit: the kind that appears in academic works. If the bullshit of ordinary life arises from indifference to truth, Cohen says, the bullshit of the academy arises from indifference to meaning. It may be perfectly sincere, but it is nevertheless nonsensical. Cohen, a specialist in Marxism, complains of having been grossly victimized by this kind of bullshit as a young man back in the nineteen-sixties, when he did a lot of reading in the French school of Marxism inspired by Louis Althusser. So traumatized was he by his struggle to make some sense of these defiantly obscure texts that he went on to found, at the end of the nineteen-seventies, a Marxist discussion group that took as its motto *Marxismus sine stercore tauri*—"Marxism without the shit of the bull."

Anyone familiar with the varieties of "theory" that have made their way from the Left Bank of Paris into American English departments will be able to multiply examples of the higher bullshit ad libitum. A few years ago, the physicist Alan Sokal concocted a deliberately meaningless parody under the title "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," and then got it accepted as a serious contribution to the journal *Social Text*. It would, of course, be hasty to dismiss all unclear discourse as bullshit. Cohen adduces a more precise criterion: the discourse must be not only unclear but unclarifiable. That is, bullshit is the obscure that cannot be rendered unobscure. How would one defend philosophers like Hegel or Heidegger from the charge that their writings are bullshit? Not, Cohen says, by showing that they cared about the truth (which would be enough to get them off the hook if they were charged with being bullshitters under Frankfurt's definition). Rather, one would try to show that their writings actually made some sense. And how could one prove the opposite: that a given statement is hopelessly unclear, and





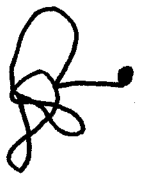
hence bullshit? One proposed test is to add a "not" to the statement and see if that makes any difference to its plausibility. If it doesn't, that statement is bullshit. As it happens, Heidegger once came very close to doing this himself. In the fourth edition of his treatise "What Is Metaphysics?" (1943), he asserted, "Being can indeed be without beings." In the fifth edition (1949), this sentence became "Being never is without beings."

Frankfurt acknowledges the higher bullshit as a distinctive variety, but he doesn't think it's very dangerous compared with the sort of bullshit that he is concerned about. While genuinely meaningless discourse may be "infuriating," he says, it is unlikely to be taken seriously for long, even in the academic world. The sort of bullshit that involves indifference to veracity is far more insidious, Frankfurt claims, since the "conduct of civilized life, and the vitality of the institutions that are indispensable to it, depend very fundamentally on respect for the distinction between the true and the false."

How evil is the bullshitter? That depends on how valuable truthfulness is. When Frankfurt observes that truthfulness is crucial in maintaining the sense of trust on which social coöperation depends, he's appealing to truth's instrumental value. Whether it has any value in itself, however, is a separate question. To take an analogy, suppose a well-functioning society depends on the belief in God, whether or not God actually exists. Someone of subversive inclinations might question the existence of God without worrying too much about the effect that might have on public morals. And the same attitude is possible toward truth. As the philosopher Bernard Williams observed in a book published in 2002, not long before his death, a suspicion of truth has been a prominent current in modern thought. It was something that Williams found lamentable. "If you do not really believe in the existence of truth," he asked, "what is the passion for truthfulness a passion for?"

The idea of questioning the existence of truth might seem bizarre. No sane person doubts that the distinction between true and false is sharp enough when it comes to statements like "Saddam had W.M.D.s" or "The cat is on the mat." But when it comes to more interesting propositions—assertions of right and wrong, judgments of beauty, grand historical narratives, talk about possibilities, scientific statements about unobservable entities—the objectivity of truth becomes harder to defend. "Deniers" of truth (as Williams called them) insist that each of us is trapped in his own point of view; we make up stories about the world and, in an exercise of power, try to impose them on others.

The battle lines between deniers and defenders of absolute truth are strangely drawn. On the pro-truth side, one finds Pope Benedict XVI, who knows that moral truths correspond to divine commands and rails against what he calls the "dictatorship of relativism." On the "anything goes" side, one finds the member of the Bush Administration who mocked the idea of objective evidence by declaring, "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality." Among philosophers, Continental poststructuralists like Bruno Latour, Jean Baudrillard, and the late Jacques Derrida tend to be arrayed on the anti-truth side. One might expect their hardheaded counterparts in Britain and the United States—practitioners of what is called analytical philosophy—to be firmly in the pro-truth camp. And yet, as Simon Blackburn observes in "Truth: A Guide" (Oxford; $25), the "brand-name" Anglophone philosophers of the past fifty years—Wittgenstein, W. V. Quine, Thomas Kuhn, Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty—have developed powerful arguments that seem to undermine the commonsense notion of truth as agreement with reality. Indeed, Blackburn says, "almost all the trends in the last generation of serious philosophy lent aid and comfort to the 'anything goes' climate"—the very climate that, Harry Frankfurt argued, has encouraged the proliferation of bullshit.



Blackburn, who is himself a professor of philosophy at Cambridge University, wants to rally the pro-truth forces. But he is also concerned to give the other side its due. In "Truth," he scrupulously considers the many forms that the case against truth has taken, going back as far as the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras, whose famous saying "Man is the measure of all things" was seized upon by Socrates as an expression of dangerous relativism. In its simplest form, relativism is easy to refute. Take the version of it that Richard Rorty, a philosopher who teaches at Stanford, once lightheartedly offered: "Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with." The problem is that contemporary Americans and Europeans won't let you get away with that characterization of truth; so, by its own standard, it cannot be true. (The late Sidney Morgenbesser's gripe about pragmatism—which, broadly speaking, equates truth with usefulness—was in the same spirit: "The trouble with pragmatism is that it's completely useless.") Then, there is the often heard complaint that the whole truth will always elude us. Fair enough, Blackburn says, but partial truths can still be perfectly objective. He quotes Clemenceau's riposte to skeptics who asked what future historians would say about the First World War: "They will not say that Belgium invaded Germany."

If relativism needed a bumper-sticker slogan, it would be Nietzsche's dictum "There are no facts, only interpretations." Nietzsche was inclined to write as if truth were manufactured rather than discovered, a matter of manipulating others into sharing our beliefs rather than getting those beliefs to "agree with reality." In another of his formulations, "Truths are illusions that we have forgotten are illusions." If that's the case, then it is hard to regard the bullshitter, who does not care about truth, as all that villainous. Perhaps, to paraphrase Nietzsche, truth is merely bullshit that has lost its stench. Blackburn has ambivalent feelings about Nietzsche, who, were it not for his "extraordinary acuteness," would qualify as "the pub bore of philosophy." Yet, he observes, at the moment Nietzsche is the most influential of the great philosophers, not to mention the "patron saint of postmodernism," so he must be grappled with. One of Nietzsche's more notorious doctrines is perspectivism—the idea that we are condemned to see the world from a partial and distorted perspective, one defined by our interests and values. Whether this doctrine led Nietzsche to a denial of truth is debatable: in his mature writings, at least, his scorn is directed at the idea of metaphysical truth, not at the scientific and historical varieties. Nevertheless, Blackburn accuses Nietzsche of sloppy thinking. There is no reason, he says, to assume that we are forever trapped in a single perspective, or that different perspectives cannot be ranked according to accuracy. And, if we can move from one perspective to another, what is to prevent us from conjoining our partial views into a reasonably objective picture of the world?

Today, Richard Rorty is probably the most prominent "truth-denier" in the academy. What makes him so formidable is the clarity and eloquence of his case against truth and, by implication, against the Western philosophical tradition. Our minds do not "mirror" the world, he says. The idea that we could somehow stand outside our own skins and survey the relationship between our thoughts and reality is a delusion. Language is an adaptation, and the words we use are tools. There are many competing vocabularies for talking about the world, some more useful than others, given human needs and interests. None of them, however, correspond to the Way Things Really Are. Inquiry is a process of reaching a consensus on the best way of coping with the world, and "truth" is just a compliment we pay to the result. Rorty is fond of quoting the American pragmatist John Dewey to the effect that the search for truth is merely part of the search for happiness. He also likes to cite Nietzsche's observation that truth is a surrogate for God. Asking of someone, "Does he love the truth?," Rorty thinks, is like asking, "Is he saved?" In our moral reasoning, he says, we no longer worry about whether our conclusions correspond to the divine will; so in the rest of our inquiry we ought to stop worrying about whether our conclusions correspond to a mind-independent reality.

Do Rorty's arguments offer aid and comfort to bullshitters? Blackburn thinks so. Creating a consensus among their peers is something that hardworking laboratory scientists try to do. But it is also what creationists and Holocaust deniers do. Rorty insists that, even though the distinction between truth and consensus is untenable, we can distinguish between "frivolous" and "serious." Some people are "serious, decent, and trustworthy"; others are "unconversable, incurious, and self-absorbed." Blackburn thinks that the only way to make this distinction is by reference to the truth: serious people care about it, whereas frivolous people do not. Yet there is another possibility that can be extrapolated from Rorty's writings: serious people care not only about producing agreement but also about justifying their methods for producing agreement. (This is, for example, something that astronomists do but astrologers don't.) That, and not an allegiance to some transcendental notion of truth, is the Rortian criterion that distinguishes serious inquirers from bullshitters.

Pragmatists and perspectivists are not the only enemies Blackburn considers, though, and much of his book is taken up with contemporary arguments turning on subversive-sounding expressions like "holism," "incommensurability," and the "Myth of the Given." Take the last of these. Our knowledge of the world, it seems reasonable to suppose, is founded on causal interactions between us and the things in it. The molecules and photons impinging on our bodies produce sensations; these sensations give rise to basic beliefs—like "I am seeing red now"—which serve as evidence for higher-level propositions about the world. The tricky part of this scheme is the connection between sensation and belief. As William James wrote, "A sensation is rather like a client who has given his case to a lawyer and then has passively to listen in the court-room to whatever account of his affairs, pleasant or unpleasant, the lawyer finds it most expedient to give." The idea that a sensation can enter directly into the process of reasoning has become known as the Myth of the Given. The late philosopher Donald Davidson, whose influence in the Anglophone philosophical world was unsurpassed, put the point succinctly: "Nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief."

This line of thought, as Blackburn observes, threatens to cut off all contact between knowledge and the world. If beliefs can be checked only against other beliefs, then the sole criterion for a set of beliefs' being true is that they form a coherent web: a picture of knowledge known as holism. And different people interacting with the causal flux that is the world might well find themselves with distinct but equally coherent webs of belief—a possibility known as incommensurability. In such circumstances, who is to say what is truth and what is bullshit? But Blackburn will have none of this. The slogan "Nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief" can't be right, he claims. After all, if "John comes in and gets a good doggy whiff, he acquires a reason for believing that Rover is in the house. If Mary looks in the fridge and sees the butter, she acquires a reason for believing that there is butter in the fridge." Not so fast, a Davidsonian might reply. Sensations do not come labelled as "doggy whiffs" or "butter sighting"; such descriptions imply a good deal of prior concept formation. What gives John a reason to believe that Rover is in the house is indeed another belief: that what he is smelling falls under the category of "doggy whiff." Blackburn is obviously right in maintaining that such beliefs arise from causal interaction with the world, and not just from voices in our heads. But justifying those beliefs—determining whether we are doing well or badly in forming them—can be a matter only of squaring them with other beliefs. Derrida was not entirely bullshitting when he said, "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" ("There is nothing outside the text").

Although Blackburn concludes that objective truth can and must survive the assaults of its critics, he himself has been forced to diminish that which he would defend. He and his allies, one might think, should be willing to give some sort of answer to the question that "jesting Pilate" put to Jesus: What is truth? The most obvious answer, that truth is correspondence to the facts, founders on the difficulty of saying just what form this "correspondence" is supposed to take, and what "facts" could possibly be other than truths themselves. Indeed, about the only thing that everyone can agree on is that each statement supplies its own conditions for being true. The statement "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white; the statement "The death penalty is wrong" is true if and only if the death penalty is wrong; and so forth. As far as Blackburn is concerned, any attempt to go beyond this simple observation by trying to mount a general theory of what makes things true or false is wrongheaded. That makes him, to use his own term, a "minimalist" about truth. By reducing truth to something "small and modest," Blackburn hopes to induce its enemies to call off their siege.

The problem with this strategy is that it leaves us with little to care about. If truth necessarily eludes our theoretical grasp, then how do we know that it has any value, let alone that it is an absolute good? Why should we worry about whether our beliefs deserve to be called "true"? Deep down, we might prefer to believe whatever helps us achieve our ends and enables us to flourish, regardless of whether it is true. We may be happier believing in God even if there is no God. We may be happier thinking that we are really good at what we do even if that is a delusion. (The people with the truest understanding of their own abilities, research suggests, tend to be depressives.)

However one feels about the authority of truth, there is a separate reason for deploring bullshit; namely, that most bullshit is ugly. When it takes the form of political propaganda, management-speak, or P.R., it is riddled with euphemism, cliché, fake folksiness, and high-sounding abstractions. The aesthetic dimension of bullshit is largely ignored in Frankfurt's essay. Yet much of what we call poetry consists of trite or false ideas in sublime language. (Oscar Wilde, in his dialogue "The Decay of Lying," suggests that the proper aim of art is "the telling of beautiful untrue things.") Bullshitting can involve an element of artistry; it offers, as Frankfurt acknowledges, opportunities for "improvisation, color, and imaginative play." When the bullshitting is done from an ulterior motive, like the selling of a product or the manipulation of an electorate, the outcome is likely to be a ghastly abuse of language. When it is done for its own sake, however, something delightful just might result. The paradigm here is Falstaff, whose refusal to be enslaved by the authority of truth is central to his comic genius. Falstaff's merry mixture of philosophy and bullshit is what makes him such a clubbable man, far better company than the dour Wittgenstein. We should by all means be severe in dealing with bullshitters of the political, the commercial, and the academic varieties. But let's not banish plump Jack. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Lunar Park, *by Bret Easton Ellis (Knopf; $24.95).* "You're not a fictional character, are you, Mr. Ellis?" someone asks in Ellis's deliriously self-referential, yet curiously moving new novel. A no longer young novelist named Bret Easton Ellis is indeed the central character. He tells the story of his life to date in the first thirty pages of the book, mixing mundane truths, plausible lies, and all-out absurdities. Then the novel takes off into the realm of horror fiction, as Ellis is stalked by his most infamous creation, Patrick Bateman, of "American Psycho," apparently with the collusion of his dead father. Ellis is up to something serious here: he is confronting his father's ghost and the wreckage of an alcoholic household. If the relatively bloodless horror narrative doesn't shock as much as it's supposed to—or maybe it's not supposed to, given that it derives from a story the Ellis character wrote when he was a terrified kid—the ending is a rhapsody of grief and reconciliation.

Sky Burial, *by Xinran, translated from the Mandarin by Julia Lovell and Esther Tyldesley (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $18.95).* In China these days, Tibet is all the rage: Beijing hipsters lounge in bars festooned with yak horns, pop divas sing ballads about Lhasa, and tourists mob the rooftop of the world. This novel, by a Beijing journalist now living in London, plays into the fantasy of the region as a Wild West populated by noble savages, with much to teach the cosmopolitan Chinese. Purporting to be a fictionalized account of a true story, it tells of a Chinese woman whose husband dies while on an Army expedition in Tibet, in 1958. She heads out west to learn the truth about his death, and winds up living with nomads for three decades, conveniently missing out on the Cultural Revolution. For American readers, the urge to mythologize the frontier will be familiar; but here there are no bad guys, only misunderstandings.

The Body of Il Duce, *by Sergio Luzzatto, translated from the Italian by Frederika Randall (Metropolitan; $26).* In the iconography of Italian Fascism, Mussolini's extraordinary physique—barrel chest, wide legs, Rodinesque brow, and jutting jaw—was ubiquitous. He was übermensch, heartthrob, and political movement rolled into one. When the dictatorship fell, it was, naturally, on Mussolini's body that his war-ravaged country took revenge; he was executed and strung up by his feet in Piazzale Loreto, in Milan. For the next twelve years, as Sergio Luzzatto's ingenious history documents, the corpse was displayed, beaten, denigrated, buried, stolen by admirers, recovered, hidden, and finally laid to rest, dramatically reduced by its postmortem adventures. For Luzzatto, Italy's relationship with its Fascist past is illuminated by the tale of a body as politically significant in death as it was in life.

The Sky's the Limit, *by Steven Gaines (Little, Brown; $26.95).* The Manhattan coöperative apartment is, according to Gaines's sportive look at New York City's residential real-estate market, "the ultimate exclusionary tool in American housing." This was not always so. In 1879, Philip Hubert, a former French teacher who became an inventor and architect, proposed giving the city's millions of tenement dwellers partial ownership of their homes as a program of uplift: "fireproof buildings in lower class areas for the lower class." Once Hubert's "home-club plan" caught on, it wasn't long before high-end speculators got in on the action. Now, to be considered for some venerable buildings, an applicant must submit three months' worth of cancelled checks, forgo a mortgage, and—in one memorable case—pretend to have a cold in order to mask a Bronx accent.

DANCING

AFTER THE FALL

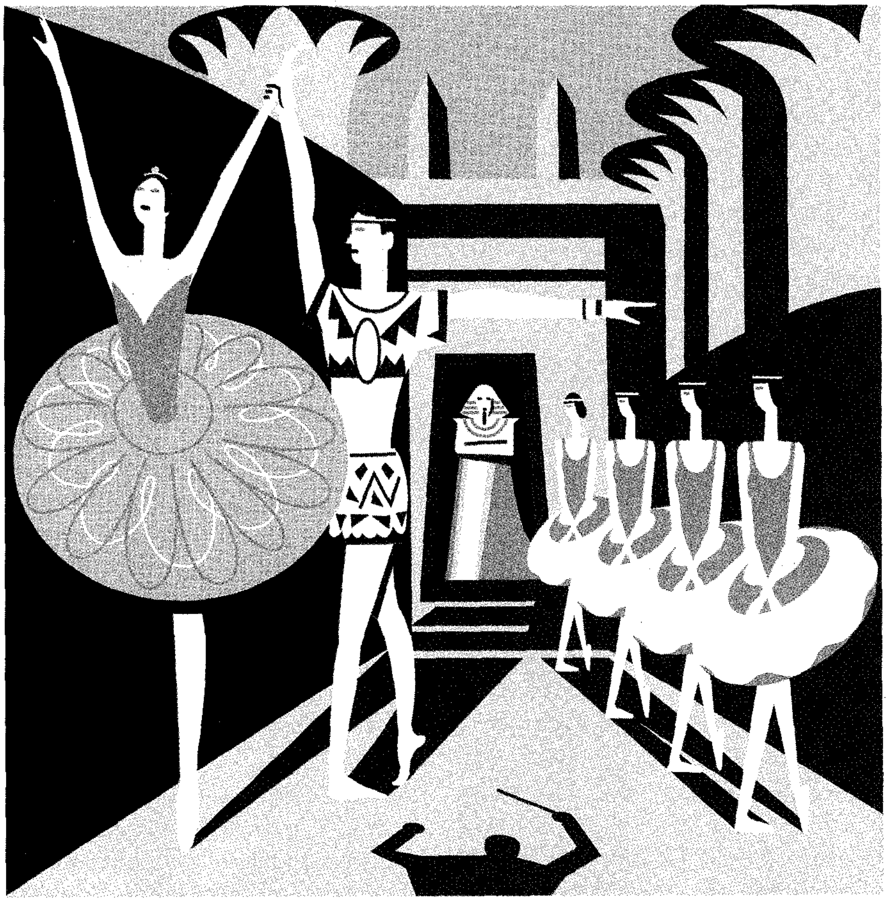
Has Russian ballet finally found a way forward?

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Whatever the Bolshoi Ballet's difficulties during the thirty-year directorship (1964-95) of Yuri Grigorovich, an autocrat and a convinced Communist, its subsequent troubles have arguably been greater. In ten years, the Bolshoi has had five directors. This is terrible for a company. So when the Bolshoi hits town—as it did, for two weeks at the Met, in July—there are two questions to ask: How are the dancers doing? And how does the repertory look?

When the Soviet Union fell, much of what the Bolshoi had in the way of evening-length ballets was pre-revolutionary classics revised according to Soviet dictates and post-revolutionary ballets created according to those dictates, tales of brave underdogs besting—or piteously defeated by—corrupt, powerful folk. How was the company to replace, or even augment, this material? How, after seventy-five years, do you unlearn the artistic lessons of Communism: the bombast, the corniness, the texturelessness? Not easily, as one can tell by looking, for example, at the work of Boris Eifman, who until quite recently was the only post-Soviet Russian choreographer who got any regular showing in New York. Underneath its un-Soviet subject matter (sex, madness), Eifman's work looks like Grigorovich's. It's as mindless as the Soviet Union asked its artists to be.

The Bolshoi, in its first week at the Met, showed us two old standards, the pre-revolutionary "Don Quixote"—an 1869 ballet by Marius Petipa, heavily revised—and "Spartacus" (1968). It's hard to say which is more boring. "Don Quixote" has been performed by the Bolshoi more than a thousand times, and it looks like it. Everything is eroded; there seems to be no plot, no characters. As for "Spartacus," Grigorovich's agitprop ballet about the famous slave revolt of the first century B.C. (read: the proletarian uprising of 1917 A.D.), you can go see it as camp, but when you're sitting there, for three hours, that naughty pleasure tends to dissipate swiftly. Practically every time Spartacus comes onstage he does so in leaps on the diagonal. Then he runs into the wings, scoots upstage, and leaps down the space on the opposite diagonal. Then his enemy Crassus comes in, leaping on the diagonal, and all you want is to go home.



This season, the Bolshoi restaged Marius Petipa's 1862 "The Pharaoh's Daughter."

RICHARD MCGUIRE

Another of the Bolshoi's offerings this season was a restaging of Petipa's "The Pharaoh's Daughter," about the love of an English explorer, Lord Wilson, and an Egyptian princess, Aspicia, who, thanks to a dose of opium, are united a few thousand years after the latter's death. This ballet, when it was premièred, in 1862, was a huge, lavish affair, with a cast of four hundred, plus camels, a monkey, a lion, a fountain, and a dust storm. Today, its choreography survives only in fragmentary notations. But lately St. Petersburg's Kirov, no less stumped than the Bolshoi about how to come up with new material, has been reconstructing nineteenth-century works. So, therefore, did the Bolshoi. The company hired the Frenchman Pierre Lacotte, who specializes in reconstituting old ballets, to put on a "Pharaoh's Daughter." Unlike some other so-called reconstructors, Lacotte made no claims to authenticity. He essentially rechoreographed the ballet, and he said so. That would be fine—who wouldn't want to see this famous spectacular, even with new dances?—except that those new dances are not at all interesting. The ballet has been severely streamlined. Once four hours long, it now runs under three hours. Still, it was hard to sit through. Lacotte never made us care a whit about Aspicia and Lord Wilson. Alexandre Benois, the Russian ballet designer, once wrote of how thrilling, how dramatic "The Pharaoh's Daughter" was when he first saw it, in the eighteen-eighties: "When she was chasing the monkey, Aspicia's face expressed such excitement and intentness that one thought she was Artemis herself; when she was escaping from the lion, her terror was such that the audience became infected with her panic." In Lacotte's version, the monkey scratched his armpit briefly and ate an apple; he and Aspicia never met. As for the lion, he got killed. I missed this, though I looked for it hard, twice.

And then came something surprising. The Bolshoi's latest director, appointed last year, is Alexei Ratmansky. Ratmansky, who is thirty-six, received his training at the Bolshoi school but was not offered a place in the company, so he went to dance in Kiev. After the fall of the Soviet government, he left, like so many other Russian dancers, and performed first with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and then with the Royal Danish Ballet. He thus got an education in Western dance, and he began to choreograph. He has now made more than twenty ballets. Americans finally got to see an evening-length piece by him in January, when the Kirov brought his 2002 "Cinderella" to Washington, D.C. The production was one of those grating "concept" affairs (faces were painted blue), but the choreography, reportedly Ratmansky's sole contribution, was a thrill, classical—the dancers did regular ballet steps—and yet touchingly natural and intimate. In the pas de deux, you could almost hear Cinderella and the prince speaking to each other. This was a melancholy "Cinderella." In the last act, when the heroine tried to forgive her sisters, they waved her away. After her final pas de deux with her beloved, the two of them lay down and went to sleep on the cold ground. Even if you got the prince, life was still hard—a message not unheard in Prokofiev's score.

This piece created some excitement, which increased when the Met announced that the Bolshoi, in its upcoming New York season, would bring another evening-length Ratmansky work. This ballet, we were told, would be a modern-minded remake of a Soviet ballet about a collective farm: "The Bright Stream," which had its première in 1935, with choreography by Fyodor Lopukhov and a score by Shostakovich. Uh-oh, I thought. A dance-drama about collectivization, made during the Terror, when "correctness" was everything: this was a sitting duck, and we were going to have to watch Ratmansky shoot it.

This turned out not to be the case either with the original, which was a light comedy, or with Ratmansky's remake. Only Boris Messerer's horn-of-plenty sets—mountains of wheat, potatoes the size of watermelons (an estimated seven million people died of hunger during the collectivization movement)—chide the Soviet Union, and only gently. Ratmansky's story is the same as in the original. A brigade of performing artists from Moscow, including a glamorous Ballerina, visits an agricultural collective, and as the farm people mix with the artists each is tempted to stray from his or her spouse. This leads, in the second act, to a number of ill-assorted trysts, none more awkward than that of the hero, Pyotr, with a woman whom he thinks is the Ballerina but who, by dint of connivance between the Ballerina and Pyotr's wife, Zina, is actually Zina in disguise. That situation is straight out of "The Marriage of Figaro." The man is cheating on his wife; meanwhile, the woman he is seducing *is* his wife, and though she is hurt by his betrayal, she loves him and cannot help responding to his blandishments. This moral tangle is poignantly unravelled in Pyotr and Zina's pas de deux. But Ratmansky's great gift is just that he has so many dance ideas. He does straight lines and snaky lines. He does unison and counterpoint and canon. He has six Cossacks doing a routine that is sort of interesting; then the Ballerina, in a kind of torpedo attack, leaps through their formation, and the dance becomes more than interesting. Such things happen every two minutes or so. You can't take your eyes off the stage.

The original "Bright Stream" was denounced by *Pravda* as a "ballet fraud," and was soon yanked from repertory. If I'm not mistaken, its sacrifice is acknowledged in Ratmansky's version. In a comic dance that comes late in the ballet, there is a Grim Reaper who mows down the performers with his scythe. Then they get up and laugh and dance some more. In life, they didn't laugh. Ratmansky summarized the consequences for the *Village Voice:* "Shostakovich never wrote another ballet, Lopukhov was dismissed, and the librettist was killed in the gulag." That Ratmansky revived this piece and memorialized its luckless creators would be almost enough: an act of justice. That the ballet, in addition, is so very good makes it something like a miracle, and a beacon.

As for the company, the season's hands-down star was Maria Alexandrova, a dramatic dancer who made "Don Quixote" bearable and, as the Ballerina, essentially carried "The Bright Stream." Alexandrova is a well-schooled ballerina, but she is more. She is like an animal: joyful, physical, seemingly unmindful. You want to run up on the stage and dance with her. The other big ballerina of the season was Svetlana Zakharova, the orchidaceous Kirov dancer who moved to the Bolshoi in 2003. Zakharova is extraordinarily beautiful, but more so when she is posing than when she is moving. That is, her specialty is not so much dance as the picture the dancer makes at the end of a phrase. She belongs back at the Kirov, where such virtues—line, form—are stressed over dynamism.

For years, the Bolshoi was a company preëminently of men—handsome, open-faced, thick-thighed fellows who could cross a stage in three leaps and make you believe that there really was such a thing as Russian soul. Compared with those cannonballs, today's Bolshoi danseurs look smaller and more refined, though some of them—for example, Alexander Vorobiev in "Spartacus"—can explode when they need to. Apart from Alexandrova, however, the supreme pleasure of the season was the junior dancers: among them Ekaterina Shipulina, Natalia Osipova, Andrey Bolotin, and Gennady Yanin. One after another, they scooped the music out of the air and turned it into riveting, this-is-my-moment dancing. They will be the company's next stars. Ratmansky has said that he wants the Bolshoi to remain true to its own style—a politic statement that may also be heartfelt. Don't tell him, but the Bolshoi style is going to change, partly because of his ballets, and so be it. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

ALL ABOUT SCHREKER

A forgotten fin-de-siècle composer.

BY ALEX ROSS

A friend once borrowed a history of opera from the library, only to find that every other page had been marked up by one of those hyper-punctuating annotators who stalk the pages of library books around the world. Whether the topic was Monteverdi, Wagner, or Gilbert and Sullivan, the voice in the margins kept returning to one agonized, enigmatic question: "WHAT ABOUT SCHREKER???" My friend, who understandably knew little of the Austrian opera composer Franz Schreker (1878-1934), began to use that graphite cri de coeur as shorthand for the cult of obscure art, which sees repertories and canons as conspiracies against neglected genius. Any gathering of aesthetes will sooner or later have a "What about Schreker?" moment.

It's a good question, though. Schreker was better on his best days than most great composers are on their off days, which is why canons of genius are suspect. A child of fin-de-siècle Vienna, he delighted in the traumas of hypersensitive artist types, capturing them inside a glistening spiderweb of orchestral sound. At the height of his career, around 1920, he was anything but obscure: his operas were staged in all the major German and Austrian houses, and he became the director of the prestigious Hochschule für Musik, in Berlin. There were various reasons for his subsequent decline: he grew less sure of himself as he passed the age of forty; the ever-changing stylistic trends of the Jazz Age left him bewildered; he was of partly Jewish descent, which meant that after the Nazi takeover of 1933 he could no longer earn a living. He tried to learn English, in preparation for possibly emigrating to America. "Ladies and gentlemen, let us begin," he wrote in his notebook. But he did not get the chance, dying, literally and figuratively, of a broken heart.

An attempt at resuscitation is under way. Schreker's operas are sidling back into the repertories of Central European opera houses. This summer, the Salzburg Festival mounted a beautifully disturbing production of "Die Gezeichneten," or "The Branded," which, between 1918 and 1930, played in twenty-two cities, and then went unheard for decades. Nazism consigned Schreker to obscurity; now German-speaking opera lovers seem determined to make amends. Heinz Fischer, the President of Austria, who is trying to quell yet more anti-Semitic noises from the country's far right, made a point of attending "Die Gezeichneten" and visiting an exhibition of Schrekeriana which the Jewish Museum of Vienna had put together. But it's tricky to frame Schreker as a virtuous victim of history. Nikolaus Lehnhoff, who directed "Die Gezeichneten," rightly perceives that there is something dangerous and strange at the heart of Schreker's music, an unstable, implosive energy, which guarantees that it will have an uneasy future.

Schreker had sharp features, a high forehead, and incisive eyes. He looked a little like Mahler, which may explain why Alma Mahler had an affair with him after her husband's death. His father was a portrait photographer for the European aristocracy; his mother came from an old Austrian Catholic family. He was one of the few young composers of his generation who refused to be overwhelmed by Richard Wagner, paying heed instead to international contemporaries, notably Debussy, Puccini, and Paul Dukas, whose opera "Ariane et Barbe-Bleue" is another hidden gem of the fin de siècle. (New York City Opera will revive it this fall.) Schreker's first major opera, "Der Ferne Klang" ("The Distant Sound"), first heard in 1912, stood out from myth-based, swords-and-sorcery operas of the period, because it was set in the present day, in the salons and cafés of the bourgeoisie. An ambitious young composer goes in search of a "distant sound," turning away from the woman who loves him. She descends into the dregs of society, not unlike Wedekind's Lulu, and only when it is too late does the artist realize his error.

From the start Schreker had an urge to make art about art, to show the exhilarating possibilities and creeping dangers of the creative path. In "The Music Box and the Princess," a wandering youth summons magic sounds with his flute. In "The Singing Devil," an organ builder creates a wondrous instrument that is supposed to bring peace, but falls into the hands of an evil fanatic. In "Der Schatzgräber," a musician uses an enchanted lute to locate buried treasure. In "Irrelohe," an itinerant fiddler sets fire to the countryside wherever he goes. And in "Christophorus," the strongest opera of his later years, a wise old composer oversees a quarrelsome posse of students, one of whom is a Schoenberg-like fanatic who "writes linearly."

Schreker wrote his own librettos, mobilizing naturalistic devices that hadn't been used in German opera before. Freudian dream journals mix with slangy chitchat; one scene melts into another with cinematic ease. There are fascinating effects of distancing: often, a character will sing in elegant phrases about something horrible—in "Gezeichneten," the soprano lingers lovingly on the word *Hässlichkeit*, or "ugliness"—while attempts at wholesome passion are undercut by dissonance. The music vacillates between melodies of Mediterranean grace and textures of otherworldly complexity. Schreker never abandoned tonality, but he made the triad a nucleus around which extra notes move in flickering orbits. Periodically, his late-Romantic orchestra dematerializes: heavy instruments recede, and chiming tones of harp, xylophone, and celesta (the sound of Tchaikovsky's Sugar Plum Fairy) take over. One minute, you are standing on solid ground; the next, you are dancing on mist.

Anything but a Romantic reactionary, Schreker was nevertheless seen as a throwback in the foxtrotting nineteen-twenties. The fashion was for hard, dry sound; he could not let go of his gossamer textures. A brilliant teacher, he watched sadly as his own students disavowed him. He got a secret revenge in “Christophorus,” which was too far-out and meta-operatic to be performed in the composer’s lifetime. (The Kiel Opera has made a good recording for the CPO label.) Master Johann’s star students are Christoph, a strutting prodigy beloved of the critics, and Anselm, an ambivalent, watchful youth. Christoph ends up a murderer, a drug addict, a disciple of brute strength. Anselm finds virtue in truth, simplicity, “female weakness”—everything that Germany was preparing to reject.

Schreker and his family on Lake Constance, in 1927.

COURTESY FRANZ SCHREKER FOUNDATION

If “Der Ferne Klang” is Schreker’s most inspired work—the Venetian party scene in Act II, with its layering of choruses, Gypsy bands, and singing gondoliers, is worthy of “Don Giovanni”—“Die Gezeichneten” is the one that takes you by the throat. The plot, which Schreker initially concocted for his Romantic-Impressionist colleague Alexander Zemlinsky, sets up a love triangle among three habitués of Renaissance Genoa: Alviano, a hunchbacked aesthete, who builds an island utopia called Elysium; Count Tamare, handsome and heartless, who, with fellow-squires, converts Elysium into a hotbed of sexual depravity, taking the daughters of Genoa’s merchant class as victims; and Carlotta, a diffident painter, who falls in love with Alviano, or at least the idea of him, only to give in to Tamare’s advances. The Schreker scholar Gösta Neuwirth has found that the scenario contains various cunning portraits of fin-de-siècle personalities. Alviano resembles the industrialist Friedrich Alfred Krupp, who built a gay pleasure den in a grotto on Capri. Tamare seems to have been based on Tamara von Hervay, an accused bigamist and witch. And Carlotta, who rightly fears that sex would kill her, is probably a stand-in for the perpetually keening Zemlinsky, as well as for the less sentimental Schoenberg, who painted in his spare time. The libretto supplies a description of Carlotta’s painting of a glowing hand: it precisely resembles one of Schoenberg’s pictures. The transposition of gender roles is typical of Schreker’s devious psychology.

The music, too, is full of deceptive surfaces and tricky allusions. It is itself a kind of magic grotto, designed to lure the unsuspecting ear. A splashy, hummable melody linked with Tamare functions like “La donna è mobile,” the ditty that the Duke sings in Verdi’s “Rigoletto”; it is the charming face of a vicious man. A complementary melody, wavering between major and minor, represents Carlotta’s moody yearning. It collapses in on itself as the opera goes on, until it becomes nothing more than a D-major triad superimposed on D-minor: a clotted, shivering mass. These unearthly sounds appear in conjunction with a finale of shameless melodrama. Some twists are predictable—Alviano kills Tamare in a rage—and some are not. When Carlotta, nearly dead in the wake of a rough night with Tamare, looks up to see Alviano, there is no tearful reconciliation. Instead, she screams, “Away, away! A troll!” Alviano goes mad. Curtain.

Lehnhoff, in his production, takes Schreker’s sadistic manipulations a step further. In the first two acts, an austere, ominous landscape unfolds: characters crawl over the surface of a gigantic broken statue, which makes for a dramatic sight amid Salzburg’s rock-hewn Felsenreitschule stage. In Act III, we enter Elysium, which here becomes a mechanical sexual ritual, not unlike the boring orgies in Pasolini’s “Salò” and Kubrick’s “Eyes Wide Shut.” In Lehnhoff’s vision, the girls who have been abducted into Elysium are not teen-agers but mere children, and they are not only raped but murdered. It is a grisly tableau out of Egon Schiele or Otto Dix. European opera stages are full of such unspeakable acts nowadays, and they usually have no dramatic point. Lehnhoff, who in other productions has proved anything but a sensationalist, knows what he is doing: he is following to the logical extreme Schreker’s cultivated understanding of the worst in human nature.

The musicologist Christopher Hailey, who has long campaigned for a Schreker revival, observes that the operas work best if they are done in the highest possible style. The Salzburg performance, despite a series of awkward cuts, came close to the ideal. Kent Nagano conducted the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester of Berlin, applying the same priestly devotion to Schreker that he brings to Mahler and Messiaen. Robert Brubaker sang the taxing role of Alviano with unflagging intensity, perhaps missing some lyric nuance along the way. Michael Volle was a charismatic and brutal Tamare. Above all, Anne Schwanewilms was transfixing as Carlotta. With her hotly expressive stage presence and coolly beautiful soprano voice, she caught the ambiguities of Carlotta’s character and, by extension, all the fire and ice of Schreker’s world. ♦

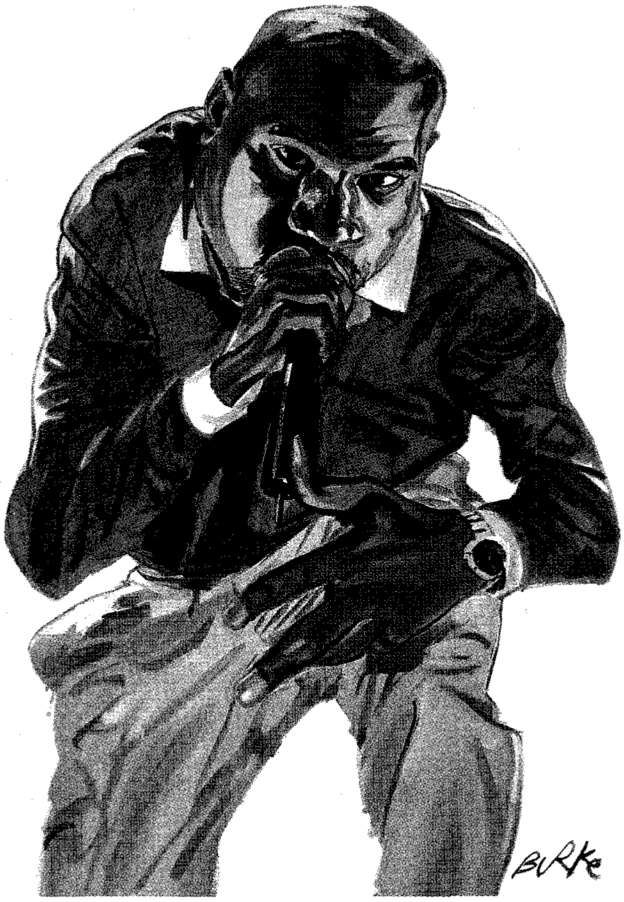
POP MUSIC

OVERDRIVE

Kanye West's high-octane ego.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

There are few pop stars as consistently discontent and as obstreperously proud as the rapper and producer Kanye West. You might think that after selling nearly three million copies of his 2004 début album, "The College Dropout," winning three awards at the Grammys (where he cavorted onstage in angel wings), hearing Jay-Z, hip-hop's paterfamilias, call him a "genius" in a rap song, and launching a line of diamond-encrusted Jesus head pendants, West would be feeling reasonably swell. But listening to his thrilling and frustrating new record, "Late Registration," is a bit like being chauffeured around in the fanciest car you can imagine by a driver who won't stop complaining about the mileage or the radio reception. You're annoyed, but at the same time you don't want the ride to end.



West is prone to both rock-star petulance and self-reproach.

PHILIP BURKE

West, who is twenty-eight years old, made his name as a producer on Jay-Z's 2001 album, "The Blueprint." His style was gimmicky but distinctive. He would sample a song by a well-known seventies band—the Jackson Five, say, or the Doors—speed up the track until the singers squeaked, and reinforce the beat with a syncopated matrix of sampled drums. At a moment when hip-hop artists, driven largely by the increasing cost of licensing samples, were creating most of their songs from scratch with digital keyboards and drum machines, West's taste for old records was appealing both to older hip-hop fans who weren't ready to leave samples behind and to tourists who didn't give a hoot about hip-hop but sure did like Motown. For the past four years, West has worked at a steady clip, producing songs for rappers like Talib Kweli and Beanie Sigel which were good enough to inspire hip-hop nerds to compile homemade mix tapes of his work.

But West was not satisfied with working behind the scenes; he wanted to perform. In 2002, after much begging and pleading—which he recounts in a bizarre eight-minute monologue at the end of "Dropout"—he persuaded Jay-Z to sign him to his Roc-A-Fella label as a rapper. His first hit was "Through the Wire," for which he sampled a substantial chunk of Chaka Khan's "Through the Fire," and rapped about a near-fatal car accident he had been in. The song was recorded while West's jaw was still wired partially shut, and it seems never to have occurred to him to wonder whether listeners would care to hear him mumble about his seat belt. In any case, the Chaka Khan sample carried the song onto the charts, and gave West an audience for his next hits, "Slow Jamz," a comic jig about seducing a woman with R. & B., and "All Falls Down," a laid-back soul tune that chronicles West's uneasy relationship with celebrity: "I wanna act ballerific, like it's all terrific. / I got a couple past due bills, I won't get specific. / I got a problem with spending before I get it. / We all self-conscious, I'm just the first to admit it."

As a lyricist, West seems mainly limited to two registers: self-mockery and self-regard—even as his musical interests have expanded. The sounds on "Late Registration" encompass decades of African-American music: gospel choirs, black-fraternity step-show chants, classic soul bass lines, and long, luxurious horn solos. On many of the songs, West collaborated with Jon Brion, who composed the scores for the movies "Magnolia" and "Punch-Drunk Love" and produced Fiona Apple's last two records—including the remarkable, still unreleased album "Extraordinary Machine," which has been circulating on the Internet this year.

Most rappers, however much they traffic in braggadocio, know the difference between their stats and their trash talk, between what they can deliver and what they pitch. West is a relentlessly clever, funny thinker, who throws away rhymes like "Before anybody wanted K. West's beats, / me and my girl split the buffet at K.F.C.," but as a rapper he is merely average. His breathy, needling voice can bring his punch lines down, and on "Late Registration" humor is too often supplanted by facile homilies like "Why everything that's supposed to be bad make me feel so good?" It's tempting to view his collaboration with Brion as further evidence of hubris—West's way of boasting, "Look, I've got a trendy guest and big production values!" In fact, the pair make terrific music together. The track "Gone" begins with a sample of Otis Redding's voice, from his song "It's Too Late," and bleeds into a two-chord piano ostinato, followed by a trim funk beat. Brion's arrangement for strings—ten violins, four violas, and four cellos—creeps into the song in small staccato bursts, deferring to and reinforcing the beat. West is warming up by putting down his rivals: "What you rappers could get is a job from me. / Maybe you could be my intern. / An intern, I'll show you how I cook up summer in the winter." Then, after guest verses by the virtuosic New York rapper Cam'ron and West's friend Consequence, the song suddenly decelerates into a spooky instrumental passage. When West takes over again, his ego is in high gear: "I'm ahead of my time, sometimes years out. / So the powers that be won't let me get my ideas out. / And that makes me want to get my advance out. / And move to Oklahoma and just live at my aunt's house." As he raps, the string section breaks into an intricate counterpoint, following the rise and fall of his voice. The strings, pop's dullest default bid for respectability, here work as hard as the m.c.

Brion adds a wonderfully honking keyboard to the end of "Gold Digger," a cheeky rebuke to groupies that has been circulating on mix tapes for more than a month, and he helps West turn a banal sentiment—"Nothing's ever promised tomorrow today"—into an addictive chorus on "Heard 'Em Say," which is sung in a sweet falsetto by Adam Levine, from Maroon 5, a parent-friendly pop band whose 2002 début record sold four million copies. West's titanic ambition almost guarantees the album's several cornball misses, including "Hey Mama," an unconvincing pledge of loyalty to West's mother (a retired English professor), and "Bring Me Down," a dopey ballad swollen with self-importance: "I have to say, since 'Pac"—the rapper Tupac Shakur—"passed away, most of you rappers don't even deserve a track from me."

Nevertheless, West seems determined to be taken seriously, to show that he can tackle issues larger than himself. Take the album's first single, "Diamonds from Sierra Leone," a track built around Shirley Bassey's 1971 James Bond theme, "Diamonds Are Forever." In the original version of the song, which was released in May, West rapped about his disappointment over failing to win a trophy at the American Music Awards: "The only playa that got robbed and kept all his jewelry." But what started as a characteristic fit of rock-star petulance quickly turned into self-reproach: "Who complain about what he is owed? And throw a tantrum like he is three years old?"

West's critique didn't end there. Apparently disturbed by reports of violence and exploitation in the African diamond trade, he made a video for the track that asked viewers not to buy "conflict diamonds." Then, in June, West remixed the song, replacing the lyrics with verses that address the issue directly: "Over here, it's the drug trade. We die from drugs. / Over there, they die from what we buy from drugs. . . . I thought my Jesus piece was so harmless, / till I seen a picture of a shorty armless, and here's the conflict. / It's in the black person's soul, to rock that gold. / Spend your whole life tryin' to get that ice. / On a polo rugby you look so nice. / How could something so wrong make me feel so right?" (He also commissioned thirty-two bars of verse from his boss, Jay-Z, who raps breezily but incongruously about other Roc-A-Fella musicians.) West doesn't go into much detail about the gem business, but he is the only diamond-wearing rapper to acknowledge the cognitive dissonance of bling. And Bassey sounds gorgeously overblown on the track. Importing a Las Vegas belter to hip-hop is the kind of ballsy move that makes West almost as good as he claims to be.

It would be a mistake to make too much of West's sudden pangs of social conscience. "Late Registration" succeeds, despite his self-involvement, largely because he is such a skillful entertainer. The album is divertingly odd, and it helps that West seems to know just how much preening his fans are likely to be able to tolerate. When, on the song "We Major," he asks, "Can I talk my shit again?," he is letting you know that he is aware of how full of it he can be. If West is the first to tell you how great he is, he is just as quick to tell you that he is simply insecure. Who doesn't understand that? ♦

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THE THEATRE

A NEW AGE OEDIPUS

The Five Lesbian Brothers update a myth.

BY HILTON ALS

On January 4, 1968, *The New York Review of Books* published a curious document. Written by Edmund Wilson, who was then seventy-two years old, and titled "An Open Letter to Mike Nichols," the essay, in epistolary form, was inspired by the revival of Lillian Hellman's 1939 drama "The Little Foxes," which Nichols had just directed. In the piece, Wilson expressed his admiration for Nichols's staging, and, referring to Walter Kerr's New York *Times* review of "Little Foxes" ("Its one unmistakable message," Kerr wrote, "is that we can have an American National Theater any time we want to"), he proposed that Nichols take up the challenge by producing a cycle of American plays—plays that were distinctly American in subject, history, and tone, and which might, like "Little Foxes," become "stage classics." Wilson submitted a list of suggestions which included A. E. Thomas's stage version of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Anna Cora Mowatt's "Fashion, or Life in New York," and "The Great Divide," by William Vaughn Moody. Most of the plays that Wilson recommended were likely unknown to younger audiences in 1968, let alone in 2005, but that only proved his point: to keep American drama alive, you have to perform it.

Since the publication of Wilson's letter, a number of repertory companies have distinguished themselves in New York—the Negro Ensemble Company, the Classical Theatre of Harlem, and the Classic Stage Company, among them. But although these institutions—like their more famous cousins, the Public Theatre and the Brooklyn Academy of Music—do present works by American playwrights, old and new, they also tend to feature work from Britain and the rest of Europe. The American theatre world, it seems, is often crippled by insecurity about its own talent, once Wilder, Miller, Williams, and Albee have been shuffled across the boards. Judging by his list for Nichols, what Wilson would demand of us if he were writing today is a theatre that deals overtly with the country's great themes: sex, race, and social class. The artists in such a theatre would explore a place where being black or Asian or queer is part of our national identity: America as a ragged quilt of difference. The playlist would include as much Adrienne Kennedy, David Rabe, Richard Foreman, Ed Bullins, and Richard Maxwell as audiences could handle. It would also include the Five Lesbian Brothers, an all-female collective of performer-writers, whose latest work, "Oedipus at Palm Springs," opened recently at the New York Theatre Workshop. (The real American theatre, one hopes, would steer clear of the didacticism that has marred most of the recent theatrical discussions of sex, race, and class—Neil LaBute's "This Is How It Goes," for instance, or the Talking Band's "Belize." It's as if our Puritan strain prevented us from making entertainment out of politics.)

Formed in 1989, the Five Lesbian Brothers put together four full-length plays before "Oedipus," impressionistic performance-based productions that made sport of many aspects of contemporary life, from queer politics to the casual verbal violence of the workplace. In all four plays, the Brothers managed to avoid bathos. They never appeared desperate to be liked, and so they felt free—and made the audience feel free—to risk everything. It's disappointing, then, to find, in the current production, too little of the group's strongest suit: irreverence. With "Oedipus at Palm Springs," the Brothers, it seems, have gone straight.

"Oedipus" is more a television sketch than a play—it would work well as an hour-long film on Showtime. Although the Brothers have maintained some of their trademark subversion, they have

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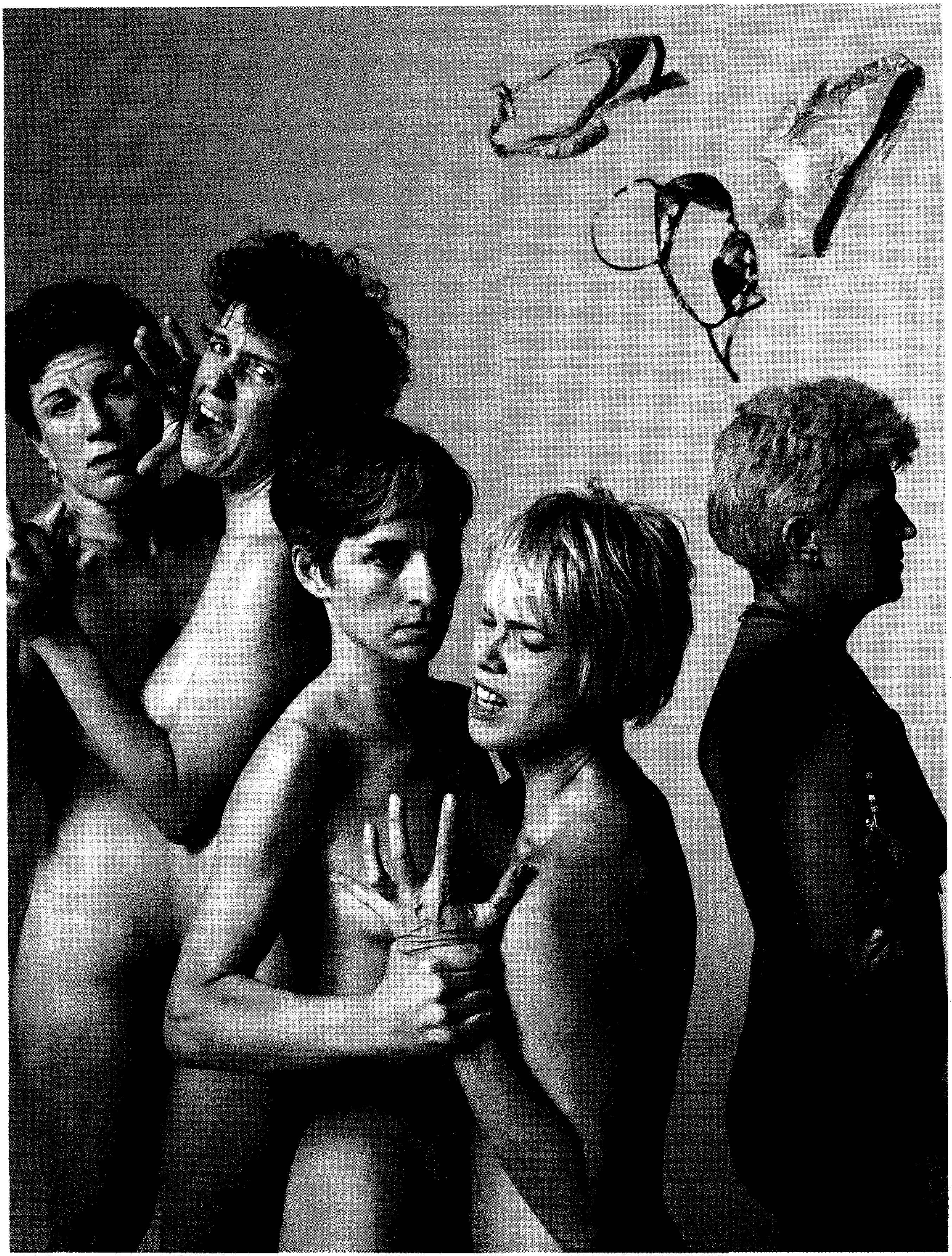

Lisa Kron, Maureen Angelos, Dominique Dibbell, Peg Healey, and Babs Davy, in August, 2005. Photograph by Max Vadukul.

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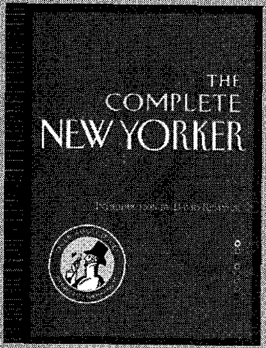

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subjected it to the constraints of an easily digestible story line. As the play opens, Joni (the fine Babs Davy), a blind caretaker at a lesbian resort in Palm Springs, stands naked, folding towels. With her bristle of salt-and-pepper hair and a long, thin braid decorated with a couple of feathers, Joni is a parody of the kind of back-to-the-land woman who finds meaning in a hawk's cry. (Her blindness is never explained; we are meant to understand that, like the oracle in Sophocles' text, it symbolizes a deeper, more seeing soul.)

Joni's habit of answering every question with a homily becomes apparent when Con and Fran (Lisa Kron and Maureen Angelos) arrive at the resort for a weekend getaway. They've been there before, and, after Con expresses her enthusiasm for the white stucco bungalows, the blue skies, and the pool, Fran asks Joni whether she has done some renovating. Joni responds, "Time passes. Some things fall away. Others take their place." It's an excellent setup for the kind of garbled New Age therapy-speak the show intends to spoof. Con and Fran are having problems. They haven't had sex since before the birth of their three-year-old son, Basil. The weekend is meant to revive their relationship, away from the demands of shared motherhood. Either they'll get it on or they'll have to go on with counselling. The problem is that Fran doesn't want sex—or, at least, she doesn't want sex with Con. When Con makes a pass, their first night at the resort, Fran turns away. Con defends herself against this rejection by announcing, "I'm not going to inappropriately sexualize you but I want to be close to you. I want to share this experience with you." On the night that I saw the show, this line drew a big laugh from the audience—probably because we had all found ourselves in a similarly absurd situation at some point, hiding our real emotions behind the thin scrim of political correctness.

Prin (the expert Dominique Dibbell) wouldn't put up with that kind of bullshit—in or out of bed. A close friend of Fran's, she arrives at the resort with her girlfriend, Terri (the adorable Peg Healey), who is there to celebrate her birthday. Prin is a kind of female Lothario: butch to a fault. But she likes her persona, and Terri—whose disposition is as sunny as the bright-colored bikini she wears with aplomb—likes it, too: the couple can barely keep their hands off each other. After Fran confesses that she and Con haven't been intimate in a long time, Prin says, in her jocular manner, "If you want to keep it going you've got to have some butch/femme sustaining energy. . . . It's not the dick, it's the attitude." Predictably, Con later counters with, "What's the point of being a lesbian if you're just aping some heterosexual paradigm?" Prin replies, "It's the attitude, I'm telling you. You want Fran to take you like a caveman."

All of this is interesting (and, as played by these actresses, very funny), not least because the dialogue addresses certain issues in feminist behavioral politics that are still being hashed out by the students of such writers as Ti-Grace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone. Are lesbians mimicking men—and thereby buying into the tropes of "typical" female behavior—if they maintain the line between "butch" and "femme"? The question won't be answered anytime soon, however—certainly not by Fran, and not this weekend. The entire issue is soon eclipsed by the gift that Con and Fran—who are known for their odd birthday presents—give to Terri, who is adopted: her birth mother's name (and the reason for the title of the play).

Unfortunately, instead of taking the opportunity to address the identity confusion that the gift provokes in Terri and Prin—which could easily set the stage for more comic absurdism—the Brothers provide us with scenes of such grating histrionics that we almost forget the charming and hilarious hour that preceded the show's "real" drama. The director, Leigh Silverman, has done a creditable job with the material. She lets the Brothers take their star turns, while reining in their tendency toward slapstick. But when the play turns self-consciously dramatic the production ceases to amuse or enlighten. It's as if the Brothers, in their bid to be taken seriously by the mainstream, had forgotten that life's lessons can be addressed comedically, too—which doesn't necessarily mean lightly. For their next play, they'll need to get rid of the hair shirt they're wearing over their collective chests. ♦

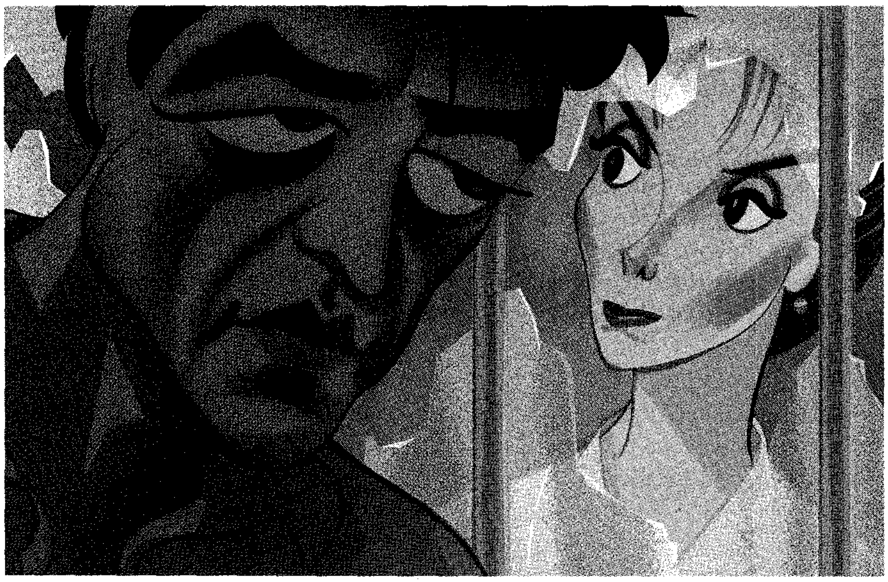
THE CURRENT CINEMA

MAD ABOUT THE BOY

"Asylum" and "2046."

BY ANTHONY LANE

It is a joke, of sorts, to take a love story of unquenchable ardor and set it in England. To set it in the England of the nineteen-fifties, however, may be stretching the joke too far. "Asylum," directed by David Mackenzie, is hell-bent on returning us to an era in which a low neckline on a cocktail dress was a threat to civil society. The dress in question belongs to Stella Raphael (Natasha Richardson), who, with her husband, Max (Hugh Bonneville), and their young son, Charlie (Gus Lewis), arrives at the clanging gates of a mental asylum. Max has been appointed deputy superintendent, a post so prestigious that the Raphaels get a home of their own within the bounds of the institution. As if that weren't joyful enough, they soon meet the cadaverous Dr. Cleave (Ian McKellen), who treats the more elaborate cases, arriving late for a party and explaining under his breath, "Rather delicate moment with our new matricide." Also in his care is Edgar (Marton Csokas), who used to be a sculptor. "What did he do?" Stella asks. "Heads, I think," Max replies.



Marton Csokas and Natasha Richardson in a film set in a fifties mental hospital.

ERIC PALMA

It's a wicked exchange, courtesy of the screenwriters Patrick Marber and Chrysanthy Balis, and the wickedness thickens once you learn that Edgar, unmanned by jealousy, decapitated his wife. Now he wanders the gardens of the asylum, doing odd jobs and patching up the greenhouse. I wish I could tell you that what happens next came as a blistering surprise, but if there's one thing that years of moviegoing teach you it is basic algebra, and the rule runs as follows: (Frustrated Wife ÷ Late-Fifties Lingerie) – √(Dull Husband) × (Demonic Yet Strangely Tender Hunk + Glowing Eyes) = Greenhouse Rock. I am not sure whether lithium is prescribed at the asylum, but, given that nobody appears to notice a fit young couple going flat-out in broad daylight, my suspicion is that both warders and inmates are doped up to the eyeballs. Much of the dialogue is scissor-sharp—you would expect no less of Marber, who wrote "Closer"—but he is up against blunt and obvious material. The moment you learn, for instance, that patients and staff are in-

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vited to meet at the annual ball, you know that Edgar and Stella will dance too close for comfort; and there they are, on cue, cheek to burning cheek.

"Asylum" began life as a novel by Patrick McGrath, who himself is the son of a superintendent of Broadmoor, the notorious British hospital that has long housed the criminally insane. The premise of the tale is thus grounded in an experience of some grit, yet the result, onscreen, is a loose compound of the predictable and the implausible. I was just about prepared to believe that our lovers might flee the asylum to be together; but the circumstances that allow them to be wrenched asunder and then brought nearer once more seem gothically wrong, requiring Dr. Cleave to mutate from a prim clinical observer into a pin-striped Svengali with a madness all his own. Ian McKellen enjoys the transformation, and you catch an impish amusement behind his gaze; for all his efforts, though, most of the picture feels blank of humor, offering us a baleful welcome to the wilder shores of love. It's the sort of film in which the characters glare speechlessly either at one another or, if provided with a mirror, at themselves, like stage actors praying for a prompt.

It must be said that "Asylum" is well accoutred as a period piece—Max's white Jaguar puts in a smooth supporting performance—yet the period to which it clings most needily is not that in which it takes place. There is, rather, a smack of the nineteen-sixties in its vision of the fruitful lunatic: the loner whose excesses, erotic and murderous, deliver a liberating jolt to the bourgeoisie. A touch of R. D. Laing, too, is detectable in the ease with which the movie allows those of unsound mind to cross into the domain of those who tend to them, and vice-versa; Stella, for example, gradually loses her marbles. Whether she remembered to pack them in the first place is another matter. From the start, Natasha Richardson is so low and haunted of voice (close your eyes and it could be her mother, Vanessa Redgrave, in full cry), and so glassy in her stunned demeanor, that her fate is, for all practical purposes, pre-sealed.

In fact, "Asylum" could even have been made in the sixties or early seventies. Little seems to have changed since the days of "Accident" or "The Go-Between," whose tasteful flayings of British hypocrisy were every bit as arch and purse-lipped as the society that they ventured to chastise. I wanted to be freaked or frightened by "Asylum," instead of which it slipped down as blamelessly as a BBC costume drama, and Marton Csokas's Edgar appears to be suffering less from homicidal insanity than from a stubborn strain of randy plaintiveness. You *could* imprison him for that, I guess, but then half the males on Earth would have to be locked up, too. Like many of today's soulful stars, Csokas doesn't have the voice to match his brooding looks—where the vocal coaches of old have gone is anybody's guess—and, instead of a vicious rasp or a molten croon, one hears nothing worse than flat wheedling as he talks to Stella about her husband and child: "Give them up or don't come back." He might as well be telling her to quit smoking.

The Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai has an abundance of fans, many of them verging on the obsessive. That is only fitting, because the majority of people in his films—from "Days of Being Wild" (1991) and "Happy Together" (1997) to his latest work, "2046"—display similar signs of loopiness. With a bewitching sleight of both hand and eye, he deals in the fragmentary and the fleeting as if they were aces and queens. "2046," which unrolls mostly in the Hong Kong of the nineteen-sixties, picks up where "In the Mood for Love" (2000) came to a close, or at any rate tailed away.

Once again, the picture stars Tony Leung as Chow, a freelance writer; scribblers everywhere will wince in fellow-pain as they see his nib poised above a page, followed by a black screen bearing the words "10 hours later," followed by the nib in exactly the same position. "In the Mood for Love"—the title covers Wong's entire field of operations—saw Chow entwined with Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung), who returns here with a flickering cameo. Now, just to confound matters, there is a second Su (Gong Li), a professional gambler who wears a lone black glove. Chow falls for her, as he does for Bai

Ling (Ziyi Zhang), a call girl who lives next door, and for the teen-aged daughter of his landlord (Faye Wong), and a parade of other dames. I am not competent to judge whether Chow is really the type to make the opposite sex go weak at the knees, waist, neck, and other points of seizure, although to my eyes he looked, with his whisker of mustache, like a no-good rat in a George Raft movie. What I will say is that nobody who has the ungallant gall to inform us, in voice-over, that "I became an expert ladies' man" is a ladies' man at all. Ladies of every description will know him better as a creep.

Nevertheless, onward they swarm, and there is no denying the buzz of their amours. Wong is less abashed by the insanely beautiful than any other current director. Every shot is colored and composed to within an inch of its life, which may be another way of saying that "2046" is a near-death experience. So many pearls gleaming in the half-dark; so much creaseless ravishment in the high silk collar of a Chinese dress; so much smoke, and so much rain, though never enough to leave the characters cross or damp—merely enough to patter around them, like applause. When even the munching of a sandwich is glossed by slow motion, as if it were a sacred rite, should we kneel in awe, or could we be forgiven for suppressing a yawn?

There are multiple story lines coiled inside the film, although the result is too ropy to be hailed as a plot. From time to time, we are spirited into a tale that Chow is writing, entitled "2046," which envisions a future where humans zip around on superfast trains, heading for a place where they can, allegedly, recapture their memories. The trains are staffed by exquisite female robots, "androids with delayed reactions," who "may want to cry, but the tear won't well up till next day." It's a gorgeous conceit, but it rebounds awkwardly on the rest of the women in this picture, all of whom have a whiff of the erotic cyborg; only Faye Wong is allowed to wriggle free of the director's stylistic choke hold and rise to the status of a person. Wong's admirers, like those of Stanley Kubrick, thrill to his visual dictatorship, but in both instances the inquiry into passion can seem a weirdly impassive affair. When I think of a true purveyor of romance, like Max Ophuls, I think of lovers whose mood for love is not imposed from on high but caught as it flashes or flows between them. Ophuls's films are unfailingly alert, whereas "2046" mugs the senses like a blend of perfume and chloroform. As for the title, well, it made me think of Thomas Carlyle's wife, who read Browning's long poem "Sordello," enjoyed it, but still couldn't work out whether Sordello was a man, a city, or a book. So it is with 2046. A place? A date? A hotel room? A bar tab? You tell me. ♦

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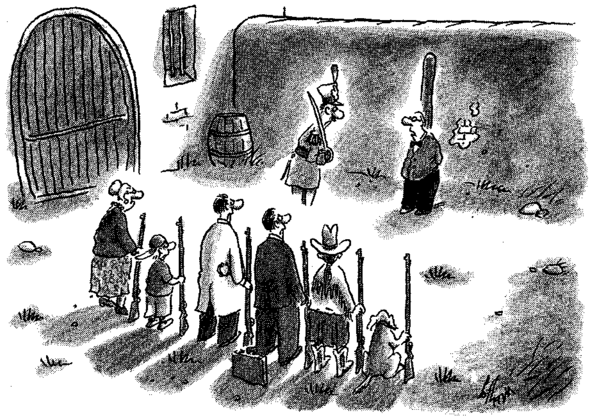
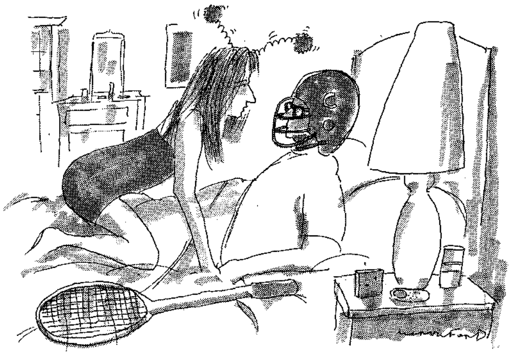
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Gahan Wilson, must be received by Sunday, August 21st. Finalists in the August 1st contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 5th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I guess my wife couldn't make it."
Lisa Goldberg, Silver Spring, Md.



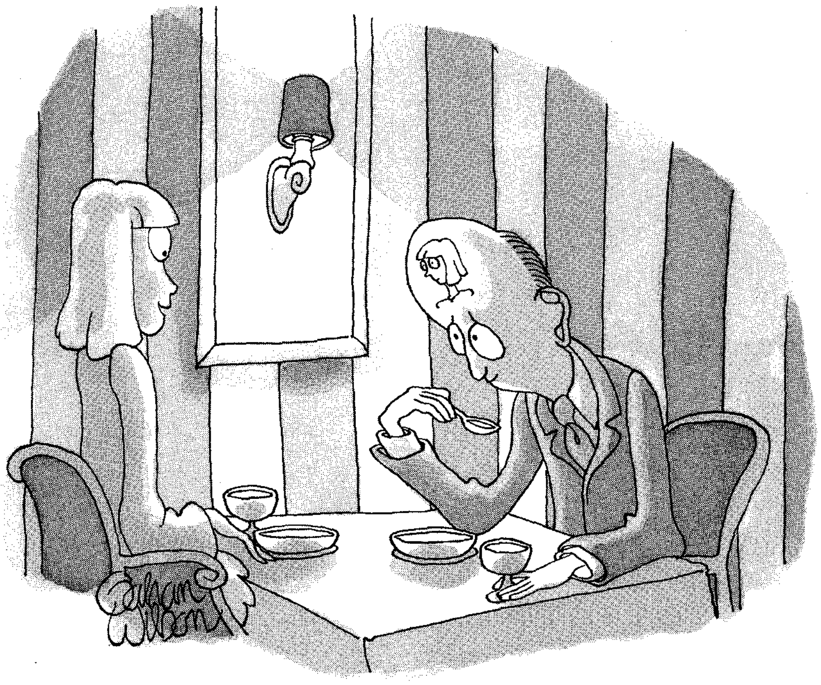
THE FINALISTS

"O.K. Now you be the naughty mosquito, and I'll be the tormented sporting-goods salesman."
Edward Bloor, Winter Garden, Fla.

"I think we need a new sex therapist."
Michele Sugg, Branford, Conn.

"This is why I love yard sales."
Scott Fitzpatrick, Westfield, N.J.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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